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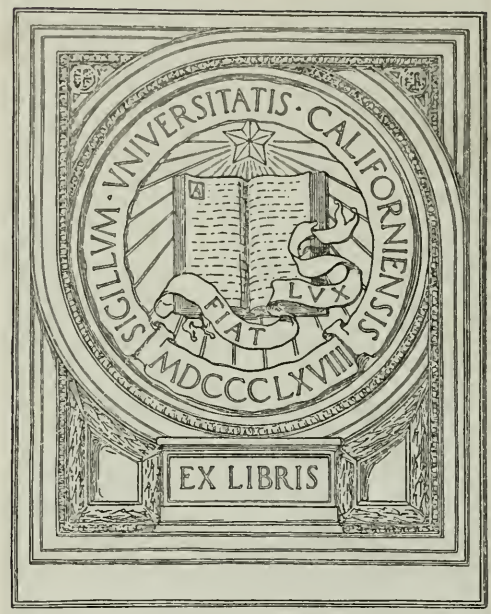
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THACKERAY — CARLYLE — GEORGE ELIOT — MATTHEW ARNOLD — RUSKIN — GEORGE MEREDITH

BY

W. C. BROWNELL

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1902

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Published October, 1901

THE DEVINNE PRESS.

TO EDWARD L. BURLINGAME

GENERAL

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THACKERAY

THACKERAY

I

THE vogue of Thackeray has steadily increased since his death. He has taken his niche in the pantheon of English prose by unanimous consent, and it is well-nigh universally admitted to be a very high one. He is already a classic. He is the representative English man of letters of his time, and one of the few great novelists of the world. Nothing of the kind is more striking than the change that has come over popular feeling with regard to his works. Instead of cynicism, he is now reproached with sentimentality by his censors. Time has brought about a better understanding of the man, and at the same time has modified the popular craving for the representation of life as a fairy-tale, and the popular disposition to resent portraiture as calumny. On the other hand, with the increase of his vogue, Thackeray has inevitably become to an appreciable extent, during the past few years, the prey of critical pedantry; and the elect, who once plumed themselves on being his apologists, have begun to look into his case with closer scrutiny, and in some cases with touchingly disillusioning results. Twenty-

five years ago Taine's essay was translated, and since then his view has been gradually filtering through the Anglo-Saxon criticism that of recent years has tended so exclusively to interest itself in and insist on art as such in all its manifestations. Taking hold of the subject somewhat tardily, perhaps, it has felt a corresponding obligation to treat it drastically, and whatever has seemed to obstruct the easy working of machinery laboriously constructed, to elude definitions painfully arrived at, has had to suffer. Taine pointed out that Thackeray had the temper of the satirist which is the opposite of that of the artist; that this was fatal to the form of his works, which were consequently greatly disfigured by moralizing extraneities; and that the artistic perfection of "Henry Esmond"—the single and striking exception among his works—illustrated with melancholy vividness the loss art had suffered by the absorption in satire of such artistic talents. This conclusion—based on assumption novel, and therefore attractive in itself, French, and therefore definite and consistent, and tending to the exaltation of art as such—had but to be stated to be adopted by those among us who, "in these days of confusion of doctrine and lessening of faith," to cite the words of a popular magazine, "are turning for something stable and indisputable, not to science, but to art." Moreover, fiction having become a "finer art" since Thackeray's day, owing to the vigorous filing and sandpapering no doubt which it has received in the

course of our critics' and craftsmen's culture evolution, the artistic vulnerability of Thackeray as an old practitioner is logically deduced. "Perhaps Voltaire was not bad-hearted," says Emerson, "yet he said of the good Jesus, even, 'I pray you let me never hear that man's name again.'" And living in our day, and in contact with much of our criticism, such a consummate artist as Voltaire, absorbed in satire as Voltaire indisputably was, might conceivably be moved to similar blasphemy against the name of "art." The instinctive would at all events exhibit impatience with the systematic critic for deploring as inartistic and rudimentary the fiction of the foremost artist of English prose.

II

In any case, the gospel of art for art's sake is reduced to absurdity when it is applied to the novel. The novel is not its own excuse for being. It is a picture of life, but a picture that not only portrays but shows the significance of its subject. Its form is particularly, uniquely elastic, and it possesses epic advantages which it would fruitlessly forego in conforming to purely dramatic canons. Its art is the handmaid of its purpose—which is to illustrate the true and aggrandize the good, as well as to express the beautiful. Like literature taken in the mass, it includes, rather than is identical with, so much

of "art"—in the sense in which we use the word with reference to inarticulate art—as suits this purpose. Its sole artistic standard is fitness; its measure, the adaptedness of means to end. And dealing thus with all of life, it is not sufficient for the novelist to "love," like Keats, "the principle of beauty in all things." He must love equally the principle of the true and the principle of the good. To force the note of "art" in the novel is to circumscribe its area of interest and limit its range of expression. It is a sacrifice to formalism that is at once needless and useless. "The bust outlasts the throne, the coin Tiberius," but the subject of the novel being rather Tiberius and the throne than busts and coins, it is not modelling and chasing as such and for their own sweet sake that endue it with enduring vitality, but qualities more significant and more profound. And these qualities depend upon the artist's personality and are inseparable from it. They are essentially human in distinction from purely intellectual or sensuous qualities. They are qualities without which purely intellectual or sensuous qualities produce a result that is often sterile and always incomplete. Wherein lies the superiority of "Don Quixote" to "Le Capitaine Fracasse," that interesting, ingenious, and really imaginative masterpiece of Gautier, the devotee, the slave, indeed, of art, and the author of the phrase about the permanence of the bust and coin just now cited in Mr. Dobson's words? In its human quality personally

expressed. Is "Gil Blas" truly or misleadingly to be called a more "artistic" performance than "Don Quixote" because there is so much Cervantes in the latter and no Le Sage at all in the former? Why is there such a sense of life in "The Newcomes," compared with Turgenieff's "Virgin Soil," that the story of the latter seems by comparison to vibrate idly *in vacuo?* Because Thackeray enwraps and embroiders his story with his personal philosophy, charges it with his personal feeling, draws out, with inexhaustible personal zest, its typical suggestiveness, and deals with his material directly instead of dispassionately and disinterestedly, after the manner of the Russian master. Can the reader do all this for himself? If he can, and can do it as well as Thackeray does it for him, he may consider it surplusage, as he may consider surplusage the Cervantes in "Don Quixote"; otherwise, in wishing it away he must reflect that "art" is an exacting mistress.

The question is, after all, mainly one of technic. When Thackeray is reproached with "bad art" for intruding upon his scene, the reproach is chiefly the recommendation of a different technic. And each man's technic is his own, and that of a master may be accepted as possessing some inner principle of propriety which any suggested improvement would compromise. But it may also be said that for the novel on a large scale, the novel as Thackeray understood and produced it, Thackeray's technic has certain clear

advantages. In order to deal with life powerfully, persuasively, and successfully, the direct method is in some respects superior to the detached. It is a commonplace in painting that the scale of subject and the kind of effect sought legitimately dictate technic; and the contention, once common among academic painters, for the same treatment of subordinate spaces and objects as that given to the salient ones, to the end that you might enjoy the result one way in the mass and then another way in the detail, has perhaps ceased to be widely held. A miniature demands a unified treatment, whereas even the intrusive "Doge Praying" of a Venetian canvas is not too great a strain on the imaginative appreciation of the beholder. And, similarly, the famous "short story," the writing of which *has* become "a finer art" since the day of "The Kickleburys on the Rhine," demands a treatment appropriate to its episodic or microcosmic character which the novel does not. And among its requisites is, very likely, — beyond all question, when one considers the personal force of most practitioners of the art,— the attitude of reserve and detachment in the writer. But Thackeray wrote novels. He was not one of the "Little Masters." He could do Dutch painting with the most adept of the cherry-stone carvers, on occasion, but he never lost sight of relations and atmosphere, and for these — in which the sense of reality resides — a freer technic is salutary.

Now the one reason for insisting on "objectivity" in art is that it is often the condition of illusion — the

illusion of reality in virtue of which art is art and not itself reality, the mere material of art. If Thackeray's "subjectivity" destroyed illusion it would indeed be inartistic. The notable thing about it is that it deepens illusion. The reality of his "happy, harmless fable-land" is wonderfully enhanced by the atmosphere with which his moralizing enfolds it, and at the same time the magic quality of this medium itself enforces our sense that it *is* fable-land, and enables us to savor *as* illusion the illusion of its art. Nothing could establish the edifice of his imaginative fiction on so sound a basis as those confidences with the reader — subtly inspired by his governing passion for truth — in which he is constantly protesting that it is fiction after all. The artistic service of this element of his fiction is aptly indicated by such a contrast as that furnished by Maupassant — a master of objective technic if there ever was one. When Maupassant exchanges the short story, in which his touch and his attainment are perfection, for a larger canvas his atmosphere evaporates. Mr. James says of "Une Vie" that if its subject had been the existence of an English lady, "the air of verisimilitude would have demanded that she should have been placed in a denser medium." He would have her surrounded with more figures, with more of the "miscellaneous *remplissage* of life." The suggestion is that of the practitioner, and in harmony with Mr. James's impersonal practice; and, aside from the point about the nationality of the heroine, which is

not very apposite, it is very just. Mr. James would have successfully condensed the medium by the "miscellaneous *remplissage* of life." But there is also the short cut to verisimilitude of a technic with more color, more personal feeling — the technic that provides a medium of sensible density by attuning the reader to the rhythm of the subject, and establishes between them a mutuality of relationship, the technic of Thackeray.

And it is to be observed that this atmosphere, which exists to such serviceable artistic ends in Thackeray's fiction, exists invariably *as* atmosphere. It accentuates the impression of verisimilitude, and constitutes in itself an element of magical artistic charm; but it is not used constructively in either character or composition. The reticulation of personal comment that rests so lightly and decoratively on the fabric of his story, all the imaginative connotation, so to say, philosophical and sentimental, of his novels, has but an auxiliary function and plays no structural part. It is not used to fill out the substance and round the outlines of his personages, who exist quite independently of it. It serves, on the contrary, to detach them from the background, to detach them from their creator himself. It is absolutely true that Thackeray's "subjectivity" in this way subtly increases the objectivity of his creations. They are in this way definitely "exteriorized." In this way we get the most vivid, the most realizing sense of them as independent existences; and in this way we get Thackeray too.

In the well-known preface to his "Pierre et Jean," Maupassant maintains that only by carefully preserving the objective attitude can a novelist avoid putting himself into his characters. Mr. James, analyzing this production with all the acuteness of the analyst who is also a craftsman, asserts that to avoid putting himself into his characters is "the difficulty of the novelist" in general, whether he pursues the impersonal manner or not, and maintains that the impersonal manner has notably failed to remove this difficulty for Maupassant himself. And he insists, as from his works one would expect him to insist, that the difficulty "only increases the beauty of the problem." Now, speaking as one must entirely for one's self, I confess that I for one have never felt in reading any of his books that this "difficulty of the novelist" existed for Thackeray at all. It was not an obstacle he had to circumvent. Whether we agree with Maupassant that in general it can best be circumvented by the impersonal attitude, or with Mr. James that there is no reliance to be placed upon any mere attitude, we may at least note that in the work of novelists of indisputably the first rank this difficulty does not have to be circumvented, since for them it does not exist. It exists for novelists impressed by "the beauty of the problem." Criticism is certainly legitimately occupied with discovering the laws of artistic production, and to these laws certainly the production of the greatest artists, as well as that of the least, is legitimately subject. But if these laws

are only approximately to be arrived at by formulating the practice of the masters, since the ideal in any art is only indicated and never perfectly illustrated in practice, they are surely not to be rigidly induced from the expedients of others in surmounting the difficulties of their "problems." And whether the novel be, as Mr. James and M. Bourget agree in calling it, the expression of "a personal view of life," or, as Taine and Maupassant maintain, a colorless view, the question as to the art of any particular novel will always be, How successful is it in giving us the illusion of the life it purports to portray?

Thackeray's characters were so little reflections of himself, they were so real to him, that, as he says in "De Finibus," "I know the sound of their voices." And it is to his sense of their reality that his constant talk of them is in no small degree to be ascribed. It is to the same sense on the reader's part that is to be attributed no small part of the reader's enjoyment in this talk. All this commentary and discursiveness, this arguing from Philip or Amelia to men and women in general, this moralizing over their traits and conduct, has the zest for us that similar criticism and gossip about real people, if any such were attainable, would possess. If it displeases any reader whose sense for "art" is keener than his interest in life, there is perhaps no more to be said — except that a sense of humor is a good thing, too, and not inapposite in any consideration of one of the greatest of humorists. But any one

but a pedant more interested in the rules than in the result of novel-writing can see that this familiar commentary not only attests but greatly enhances the sense of reality, of life, in the characters that furnish its text. Even technically considered, it is in this respect the acme of art. In Thackeray's hands it does not distract the attention, but concentrates it upon the representative, the typical, the vital traits of his personages. Taine himself having occasion to censure what he deems Thackeray's cruel irony in his treatment of Rebecca, and oppose to it Balzac's attitude toward Valérie Marneffe, explains the superiority of the latter by the assertion that "Balzac loves his Valérie." To his assertion that the great artists always exhibit his lauded impartial detachment, a critic far less the slave of his abstract inductions, Matthew Arnold, replies that the burden of all the great works of literature, from the "Agamemnon" down, is a desire that the good may prevail. I am not sure how far his love for Madame Marneffe may count in Balzac's favor, but certainly his general attitude of purely scientific though inexhaustible curiosity is responsible for much of the incurable artificiality that impairs his art. His figures are always definite, but real as they are, they are not always alive. It is the touch of personal feeling that communicates the Promethean spark.

The peril of possessing a gift like this is the disposition to exercise it in excess. When personal expression is so easy, so admirable, and so successful as

Thackeray's, when, as with him, it is a faculty clearly to be exercised instead of repressed, the temptation to rely upon it, to overwork it, to give it a free rein, is very great. Even in the unique "Roundabout Papers," which are its expression *par excellence*, there are instances of this excess. "Philip" is a notable instance. Thackerayans read "Philip" — or even "Lovel the Widower"—without finding a dull page in it, just as Wordsworthians read "Vaudracour and Julia," and the whole series of the "Ecclesiastical Sonnets," partly, no doubt, out of mere momentum. But every one cannot be a Thackerayan, and for others the interest of "Philip" now and then flags, probably. It is, indeed, a *tour de force* in prolixity. The proportion of Thackeray to Philip is prodigious. The story is decidedly thin; there is next to no plot, and the incidents are few and of the same family. The first hundred pages are astonishing variations on the single theme of Philip's antagonism to his father. A great deal of the book is pure "copy." Even the color is borrowed here and there from its predecessors, as where the Little Sister "admires" Philip for knocking down the Reverend Tufton Hunt, though not of course in the same way that Rebecca does her husband, "standing there, strong, brave, victorious," after similar treatment of Lord Steyne, and where Dr. Firmin's picture of "Abraham Offering up Isaac" performs the service of the Jacob-and-Esau tile in the fireplace at Castlewood. How many letters are there from Dr. Firmin in America;

how many glimpses of the Pendennis interior with Laura and the children engaged in "osculation"; how many times does Philip get into the same quarrel with different people! The characters save the story from mediocrity — and triumphantly. They are drawn with the true Thackerayan firmness and distinction. Where, indeed, is there a weak line in any portrait of his populous gallery? But they have not quite the relief of their fellows, and the book would have been far less important than it is, distinctly a minor production, but for the preachment that occupies so disproportionate a space, and, moreover, is of inferior quality to that of the great novels, of "Vanity Fair" and "The Newcomes." And yet excessive as it is and fringing perfunctoriness as it does, it shows itself in this crucial instance of "Philip" — where it is not only abused, but treated too lightly — essentially not a defect but a quality of Thackeray's equipment.

III

THACKERAY'S practice is not perhaps to be recommended, and critics who have the art of fiction at heart cannot do better than to insist on the value of the detached attitude in the author. But any view of Thackeray is an imperfect one which does not perceive that he is a notable exception to the rule wisely enough prescribing this attitude in general. His personal force and charm take him quite outside of its operation.

The perfection with which the artist and the satirist are united — or rather fused — in him almost entitles his novels to classification as a different *genre*. At least, in order to consider them profitably it is necessary to take into account in far greater degree than in other instances the man himself as well as his works. A correct synthesis is reached most directly in his case by regarding his works mainly as manifestations of the genius that unifies them. Even critics who think it bad art for an author to obtrude his personality must admit that the evil is lessened in proportion to the interest of the personality so obtruded. As to the interest of Thackeray's, there is likely to be no contention. It is one of the most marked in letters. When one considers his personal force, the notion of confining its direct expression to pure dissertation appears grotesque. To the true Thackerayan, of course — like Dr. John Brown, Mr. Herman Merivale, or Mr. William B. Reed — no price is too great to pay for any of its manifestations. It has as much charm as power, and is infinitely gracious and winning. It provides an atmosphere of its own in which his characters live and move, and to which they owe no small portion of their attractiveness — in virtue of which, indeed, they constitute an organic community by themselves. If he is their "showman," he certainly shows them off to advantage, and he himself is not the least interesting figure of the show. The spectacle gains immensely from his association with the company. How he thinks and feels in the

presence of the drama they are enacting immensely extends the range of our interest. Conceive "The Newcomes" without the presence of Thackeray upon the stage — minus the view it gives us of the working of its author's mind, the glimpses of his philosophy, the touches of his feeling. The result would be like that of eliminating the commentary which Colonel Henry Esmond interweaves with his autobiography. Well, but Esmond is one of the characters of the book, and his prosings are therefore pertinent, says Taine. So is Arthur Pendennis, Esq., the putative author of "The Newcomes." But Pendennis is the thinnest of whimsical disguises for the real author, and the half-hearted attempt to continue him and Laura as characters is purely playful. True, they *are* needless sops to the critical Cerberus, and, aside from adding pleasantly to the machinery of the story, they really serve to show how legitimately the reader who is not a pedant may enjoy the personality of Thackeray apart from as well as with any artistic expedients of the sort.

In a more definite and apposite way, therefore, than is true of a personality that produces works of a more impersonal order, Thackeray's own nature becomes the most interesting and important subject to consider in connection with his works. He was above all else a lover of truth. The love of truth was with him, indeed, less a sentiment than a passion. It absorbed his mind and inspired its activity. To the moral temperament thus attested, falsehood of all kinds seemed the

one thing in the universe worth the evocation of militant energy. The exposure of sham enlisted all his artistic faculty. He pursued it with the most searching subtlety ever devoted to a definite artistic aim in all his books. The villain of all his stories is the hypocrite. Some of them — "Barry Lyndon," "The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan," "The Book of Snobs" — are concerned with pretence alone, the pretence that eludes the detection of others and that which deceives the pretender himself. "The Book of Snobs" is an amazing series of variations on this single theme — hardly robust enough in itself to have avoided flatness and failure, in the course of such elaboration, by a writer less "possessed" by it. This at least is what saves its perennial interest for other readers than those familiar with the particular society it satirizes, for other than English readers, that is to say. "You must not judge hastily or vulgarly of snobs; to do so shows that you are yourself a snob. I myself have been taken for one." These statements are for all nationalities.

It need hardly be pointed out that hypocrisy constitutes one of the most effective elements which the novelist can use in portraying human life on a large scale and under civilized conditions. Imposture of one kind or another almost monopolizes the seamy side of any society's existence. In the material of the novelist of manners it has the same place as crime in that of the romance of adventure. It is the natural con-

comitant of gregariousness, the great social bane, the social incarnation of Ahriman, the shadow if not also the middle tint of the social picture. Almost inevitably the novelist, who both by predisposition and by practice handles it well, presents a picture of sound and vital verisimilitude, and of profounder and more universal significance than a study of most other social forces affords.

Thackeray was extremely sensitive, and his susceptibility was as highly organized as it was sensitive. He was quick to take offence when his sense of self-respect was touched, and he was nothing less than weakly amiable. His quarrel with Dickens over Yates's "journalistic" *faux pas* is witness of both, as their reconciliation is of his incapability of cherishing rancor. In the ocean of *ana* that since his death has eddied about his name are countless instances of his goodness of heart, the prodigious fund of kindness in his nature, and the tact of its dispensation. All women with whom he came in contact expanded in the atmosphere of his chivalry—the atmosphere, say, of the Brookfield Letters. He was an ideal clubman. He had the most deeply attached friends. His fondness for children is proverbial. He used to go to St. Paul's on Charity Children's day to hear the thousands of young voices singing in unison, with the result and to the end of the dimming of his spectacles and the enjoyment of "happy pity." He loved to tip schoolboys, to frequent Bohemia. Artlessness of all kinds

had a special attraction for him. What displeased him most in the affectation that always revolted him, was its element of calculation. He had none of it himself. Of all prose writers of the first rank he is the most purely instinctive. His high spirits are astonishing. They are the source of the infectiousness of his humor as well as responsible for its occasional triviality. And their undercurrent is a melancholy that is as native as they. When they flag, the lapse is not into dulness—there is more dulness in Voltaire; it is into the allied minor key, which is pursued with the same sincerity—one is tempted to add, with the same zest. Work was mainly drudgery to him, in spite of the amount of it which he performed and the persistency with which he labored. He was thoroughly human in his weaknesses as in his sympathies, and the sobriety and industry with which he subdued his temperamental tendencies and, by control and constraint, compelled his faculties to construct the literary monument he left, fashioned in the process a character that is, in its way, also a monument of elevated effort.

Such a nature is too ample to be distinctly critical, and Thackeray's had its prejudices, searching as was the mind that governed it. His body of doctrine was traditional, and he devoted little thought to what Carlyle calls "verifying one's ready-reckoner." His genius is rather that of the born novelist. He ascribes Napoleon's final defeat to the development of

military superiority in Wellington. His view of Louis XIV. lacks seriousness. His attitude toward things French, in general, always good-natured, is yet fundamentally British,—see "The Second Funeral of Napoleon," "The Paris Sketch-Book,"—intimately as Paris appealed to his epicurean side and sympathetically divined and described as his French characters are. But in portraying these he is exercising his genius, which is never at fault. And it appears as unmistakably in his essays, his burlesques, his sketches, his literary criticism, as in his novels themselves. No writer whose fame rests, as Thackeray's larger fame does, on notable works of fiction, has written miscellaneous literature of such distinction. There is extraordinarily little "copy" in it. It is the lighter work of a man born for greater things, and having therefore in its quality something superior to its *genre*.

On the other hand, the "illustration," for which he seemed to think he had a native bent and which he curiously persisted in, is almost unaccountable considered in conjunction with any of his other accomplishment, until we remember how little art was exacted of "illustrators" by the England of his day. Pictorial art was clearly not his vocation. His drawings have plenty of character; and it is not unfortunate, perhaps, that we have his pictorial presentment rather than another's, of so many of his personages. But he not only lacked the skill that comes of training—he had no real gift for representation, and for

the plastic expression of beauty he had no faculty; the element of caricature is prominent in all his designs. He did them with great delight and ease, whereas literary work was always drudgery to him; but of course this is the converse of witness to their merit.

His poetry, which he wrote at intervals, and desultorily throughout his career, is on a decidedly higher plane. It is of the kind that is accurately called "verses," but it is as plainly his own as his prose; and some of it will always be read, probably, for its feeling and its felicity. It is the verse mainly but not merely of the improvisatore. It never oversteps the modesty becoming the native gift that expresses itself in it. Most of it could not have been as well said in prose; and its title is clear enough, however unpretentious. Metrically and in substance the "Ballads" are excellent balladry. They never rise to Scott's level of heroic *bravura*, and though the contemplative ones are deeper in feeling than any of Scott's, they are poetically more summary and have less sweep; one hardly thinks of the pinions of song at all in connection with them. Prose was distinctly Thackeray's medium more exclusively than it was Scott's. But compare the best of the "Ballads" with Macaulay's "Lays," to note the difference in both quality and execution between the verse of a writer with a clear poetic strain in his temperament, and the "numbers" of a pure rhetorician. "The White Squall" is a *tour de force* of rhyme

and rhythm; the "Ballad of Bouillabaisse" has a place in every reader's affections; "Mr. Moloney's Account of the Ball" is a perpetual delight; even "The Crystal Palace" is not merely clever; and "The Pen and the Album" and notably the "Vanitas Vanitatum" verses have an elevation that is both solemn and moving—a sustained note of genuine lyric inspiration chanting gravely the burden of all the poet's prose.

Nowhere is the special quality of his genius more apparent than in the admirable series of "Lectures on the English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century," which is literary criticism of a high order, but distinctly the criticism of the novelist rather than of the critic. It occupies, for this reason, a place by itself. It is hardly such an account of the literature of the Augustan age as Professor Saintsbury would write. It quite neglects the element of literary evolution, is unconscious of the historical or any other method, does not discuss the poetic weakness of an age of prose, and is not based on minute and studious textual examination of its subject but on saturation with it. Its annotation had to be left to Mr. Hannay, I believe, who performed the work very agreeably, and probably better than Thackeray would have done. From the point of view of literary criticism, at least of the scientific literary criticism of the present day, the work may certainly be said to have been lightly undertaken. The lecture on Swift ends: "We have other great names to mention — none I think, however, so great

or so gloomy." The consideration of Pope begins: "We are now come to the greatest name on our list." Stella is made a natural daughter of Sir William Temple on the authority of pure divination. The literary importance of Steele and Goldsmith is exaggerated, and that of Sterne minimized in accordance with the personal predilections and antipathy of the critic. Addison is reproached with coldness, not with commonplace. One would hardly suspect that "Clarissa Harlowe" was a classic and Richardson a notable artist, as well as a sentimental foil for "the manly, the English Harry Fielding"; or that Hogarth was an admirable painter as well as a great humorist. The characters of the writers are the real subject of the series, which is an unequalled gallery of literary portraits. Each one is all there. The painter may have treated the detail indifferently here and there, overemphasized an expression, missed the full value of some features, but they stand out with the same vivid distinctness that belongs to the characters of his fiction. He has visualized them in the same way. One may say the same thing of the lectures on "The Four Georges," who although in the pillory in his pages, owe him their fame. He was, in a word, by temperament and faculty, first and last a novelist.

IV

For this reason his world is an extremely concrete world. His people are the people we meet or might

meet; his characters are types, not variants and exceptions, and, accordingly, they have a human and social rather than a psychological interest. Thus, M. Scherer distinguishes him as a novelist of manners, contrasted with George Eliot, a novelist of character. The distinction, at any rate, needs this explanation, for it cannot be said that the characters of Thackeray which illustrate manners are lacking in individual interest. But they are delineated rather than dissected; they are not explored clinically. They are not studied and scrutinized in the spirit of the scientist or the philosopher. And the difference is deeper than mere manner of artistic presentation. Tito Melema has something the interest of Faust or Mephistopheles. You seek their counterparts in your own mind. "Goethe found," says Emerson, "that the essence of this hobgoblin which had hovered in the shadow ever since there were men was pure intellect, applied—as always there is a tendency—to the service of the senses," and, accordingly, "flung" Mephistopheles "into literature." Similarly, George Eliot incarnates in Tito the abstraction of the spirit that shrinks from what is unpleasant. The reader's introspection assures him of his own tragic potentialities in this regard, and, seen through his own imagination, Tito becomes vividly real to him. The interest of Thackeray's Rebecca is of quite another kind. She is a type, a representative of a class, noted, fixed, observed, and described, as far as possible removed, in genesis, from the abstract.

You know that Tito is going to act in direct illustration of the principle that he almost personifies. You don't know at all what Rebecca is going to do next. Thackeray professed ignorance of what she really did, of how far she really went. She has the reality of Maggie Tulliver—a truly Thackerayan character, and one of the few in George Eliot that do not acquire their reality through an appeal to the imagination. Her psychology is simple enough; so is the morally complicated Beatrix Esmond's. The philosophy they illustrate is not obscure, and they give rise to very little speculation.

The caricature that a character of Dickens is apt to be proceeds from its being a characteristic in action. A character of George Eliot is formed of many characteristics, fused with remarkable and sympathetic insight, but after all it is essentially a product of induction. Compare one of the happiest results of this procedure, the banker Bulstrode in "Middlemarch," with, say, Dr. Firmin, greatly Bulstrode's inferior in complexity, in intellectual interest. One is flesh and blood, the other attracts you because of the striking way in which moral self-sophistication is embodied. Nothing better attests George Eliot's scientific interest in character than her constant exhibition of its evolution. This is one of her real contributions to literature. The effect of circumstances in developing a character like Lydgate, for example, the difference between Rosamond as she is first introduced and when she leaves the

stage, are almost Spencerian demonstrations. This, as Mr. Albert Dicey, I think, has observed, was an unknown thing in fiction when George Eliot began to write, and it is naturally savored by the palate of our day, which seeks a taste of science even in its literary confections. But it is needless to point out that it implies an instinct quite lacking in Thackeray, in whose view character is spectacle, significant spectacle, to be sure, and its significance often copiously insisted upon, but essentially spectacle, and not the illustrative incarnation of interesting traits and tendencies. This is also Shakespeare's view, it may be added, as it is clearly the distinctly literary view as opposed to the scientific.

The initial procedure of the human mind, however, is in *a priori* order, and the artist, like every one else, begins with ideas. We are taught at school that there can be no evolution without a previous involution. The idea underlying the world Thackeray constructed is the intricate moral complexity of character—an idea illustrated with a completeness and relief not perhaps to be met with elsewhere outside of Shakespeare and Molière. The personages of fiction before his time, at all events, are morally pretty much all of a piece. It is apt to be either Jones or Blifil with most writers, eminently so in the case of the Romanticists, of course. Thackeray's absorption in the moral interest of character is, on the other hand, naturally limiting. It excludes, or relegates to the background, that fourth part

of life which remains after assigning, according to Arnold's formula, three fourths to conduct. Of this fourth, other writers—Shakespeare and Molière among them—make a good deal, it need not be said. And of course in eschewing it—in confining himself in the main to character not merely in its elemental traits, but in its morally significant ones as well—a realist like Thackeray renounces a field so large and interesting as justly to have his neglect of it accounted to him as a limitation. The colorless characters, such as Tom Tulliver for a single example, in which George Eliot is so strong, the irresponsible ones, such as Dickens's Jingles and Swivellers, have few fellows in his fiction, from which the seriousness of his satiric strain excludes whatever is not significant as well as whatever is purely particular. The loss is very great, considering his world as a *comédie humaine*. It involves more than the elimination of psychology—it diminishes the number of types; and all types are interesting, whether morally important or not.

But in Thackeray's case it has two great compensations. In the first place, the greater concentration it involves notably defines and emphasizes the net impression of his works. It unifies their effect; and sharply crystallizes the message to mankind, which, like every great writer, whatever branch of literature he may cultivate, it was the main business, the aim and crown and apology of his life to deliver. In the second place, it is his concentration upon the morally significant

that places him at the head of the novelists of manners. It is the moral and social qualities, of course, that unite men in society, and make it something other than the sum of the individuals composing it. Thackeray's personages are never portrayed in isolation. They are a part of the *milieu* in which they exist, and which has itself therefore much more distinction and relief than an environment which is merely a framework. How they regard each other, how they feel toward and what they think of each other, the mutuality of their very numerous and vital relations, furnishes an important strand in the texture of the story in which they figure. Their activities are modified by the air they breathe in common. Their conduct is controlled, their ideas affected, even their desires and ambitions dictated, by the general ideals of the society that includes them. So far as it goes, therefore,—and it would be easy to exaggerate its limitations, which are trivial in comparison,—Thackeray's picture of society is the most vivid, as it is incontestably the most real, in prose fiction. The temperament of the artist and satirist combined, the preoccupation with the moral element in character,—and in logical sequence, with its human and social side,—lead naturally to the next step of viewing man in his relations, and the construction of a miniature world. And in addition to the high place in literature won for him by his insight into character, Thackeray's social picture has given him a distinction that is perhaps unique.

Furthermore, compared with the moral interest of character, that of its purely psychological peculiarities is distinctly less vital and permanent. The interest, for instance, of Micawber or Mantalini is inferior to and more transitory than that of Captain Costigan. Character, indeed, *means* moral character. As Stendhal puts it: "Molière painted with more depth than the other poets; therefore he is more moral." And I have never heard it suggested that Thackeray's personages, morally considered as they are, lacked psychological definition — any more than those of George Eliot, who has the converse preoccupation, lack moral significance. The moral element in their portrayal adds reality and relief, as well as importance. Its complexity, at any rate, is Thackeray's theme, and he, at least, found it inexhaustible. With him no passion is simple, no motive unmixed. Affection is alloyed with injustice, innocence with selfishness, generosity with folly, love itself with hallucination, jealousy, and calculation.

Nowhere is this to be so plainly noted as in his women, because women, being less highly differentiated than men, exhibit more clearly their native and elemental inconsistencies. They are the constant quantity in the human equation. No one ever heard of the *ewig männliches*. Instances crowd the memory. Thackeray triumphs with equal distinction in the analysis that discovers the sound alloy in base metal and in that which finds dross in the most refined. Rachel Castlewood and her brilliant daughter, Ethel Newcome and Re-

becca, are equally complicated. Amelia is elaborately structural compared with her namesake and prototype in Fielding, and any one who mistakes her for a simple character has missed "Vanity Fair." But Beatrix is probably her creator's masterpiece. She is on a larger scale than Rebecca, and she is not only more splendid, but even less fixed and absolute. Rebecca might have been virtuous, as she said, on five thousand a year, but Beatrix had infinite possibilities and at any moment might have realized them. It is largely due to her that "The Virginians," fine as it is in wealth of incident and variety of character, ranks with the great novels rather than with "Philip," or even with what we can divine "Denis Duval" would have proved had Thackeray lived to complete it.

"Esmond" is not the greatest of the novels; it is the most perfect. Thackeray was quite right in calling it "the very best that I can do," and speaking of leaving it behind him as his card. A writer judges of his own work preferably as an artist, and as an artist his aim is to please and his effort is for flawlessness. Both in conception and in workmanship, "Esmond" is well-nigh flawless. Mr. Lowell found a modern locution in it, I believe, and Trollope accepted, rather priggishly, Thackeray's assertion that Esmond himself was a bit of a prig. But it has fewer flaws probably than any work of either its kind or its scale ever written. It is as a novel what the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is as a poem. The archaism of its style is far more than, quite other

than, a literary feat. It is a sustained and complete illusion, an envelope of atmosphere in which the story rests exquisitely transfigured. The plot is always praised for its perfection; the story is developed with harmonious and tranquil art; the element of *beauty* is everywhere prominent in it. It contains some of Thackeray's rarest writing—in passages like that relating Esmond's visit to the convent cemetery at Brussels, in the entire chapter called "The 29th December." The beauty of Beatrix is the mainspring of the book's action; that of her *mater pulchra* is a softened and spiritualized parallel. The very fragrance of romance perfumes the air at Castlewood; the tone of quiet, of refinement, of elevation is so perfectly preserved that one of Philip Firmin's laughs, one of old Major Pendennis's worldly harangues, the sound of Lady Kew's voice, would be a jar. It is Thackeray's artistic—perhaps one may rather say his poetic—masterpiece. But if it were his only work, or its vein his only vein, Thackeray would mean far less to us than he does. There are devotees of art who prefer "The Blithedale Romance" to "The Scarlet Letter," but their view is an esoteric view, and as Hawthorne's fame does not rest mainly on his most artistic performance, so Thackeray's is as firmly established on the other three members of "the great quadrilateral" (as, with "Esmond," "Vanity Fair," "Pendennis," and "The Newcomes" have been called) as on "Esmond" itself. Life is a larger thing than art, and perhaps no rounded and perfect synthesis

gives the sense of it quite as well as a representation that images its inequalities.

It is this sense of life that rules in the books just mentioned. It appears in its intensity in "Vanity Fair," in its variety in "The Newcomes," in its immitigability in "Pendennis," with a definiteness and reality to be found elsewhere only in the few great classics of literature. The tension of "Vanity Fair" is almost oppressive. The first-fruits of Thackeray's maturity, after the Titmarsh period, and coming as it did into the world of fiction occupied by the writers burlesqued in the "Novels by Eminent Hands," its substitution of truth for convention had something almost fierce in it. The title alone, the few words "Before the Curtain," the last paragraph of the book, pointed its felicity of extreme pertinence, and any one could see that a new power in fiction had arisen. But it is not its satiric force that has preserved it. It has the perennial interest of fundamental spontaneity, and its tinge of Juvenalian color merely accentuates its positive and constructive quality. Life in it is tremendously real, whatever its goal. It is not a fairy-tale, and things are far from what they seem. Any episode or incident or subordinate character of the story shares its intensity. The unedifying career of Jos Sedley, for example, is grimly vital. I remember no book which is, like "Vanity Fair," a portrayal of life rather than purely a satire that is so free from triviality.

"Pendennis" is a different picture altogether. It

is pervaded by a blander air, but the sense of life in it is as distinct as in its intenser predecessor. With greater elaboration and ampler illustration it shows the weight that life imposes on the human struggle for the attainment of ideals as such, the idleness of combating it, the necessity of compromise, the unique safety of humility in the presence of its overwhelming pressure, the dignity and importance of it, which become tyranny in antagonism, and are only to be converted into allies by preserving an attitude of modesty and respect. Life and the world are different things, and doubtless when "the world is too much with us" we miss life in its largest sense. But this is a triter moral than that of "Pendennis," which illustrates on the other hand the philistinism of the protestant and the non-conformist as vividly as the pharisaism of worldliness. Life is not a simple thing; its prizes are either unattainable or less desirable than they seem from a distance; there are far fewer of them than youth believes; the problem of existence is prodigiously complicated; it has to be reckoned with, and largely on its own terms. The essence of the book is in the famous talk between Pen and Warrington. Nothing can be deeper than the lesson of Warrington's failure. Life has been too much for him; he has found it immitigable, as I said; but it has left him nevertheless at the true centre of things. Pen comes back to Laura at last after both wandering and soaring. The end is repose in the haven, not a career of tri-

umph. "When duty whispers low, 'Thou must,' the youth replies, 'I can,'" in Emerson's tonic words. But the wise youth's reply must be whispered as low as duty's command, and let him not fancy he is greatly forwarded by his ability, or is other than an infinitesimal part of the life of the world, which encompasses him completely, if haply it does not oppress his energies and render them as futile as they seemed to Swift and St. Augustine.

As for "The Newcomes," it is an epitome of human life in its manifold variety of social and individual phases unmatched, I think, in fiction. Its range is extraordinary for the thread of a single story to follow. Yet all its parts are as interdependent as they are numerous and varied. It is Thackeray's largest canvas, and it is filled with the greatest ease and to the borders. It stands incontestably at the head of the novels of manners. And it illustrates manners with an unexampled crowd of characters, the handling of which, without repetition or confusion, without digression or discord, exhibits the control of the artist equally with the imaginative and creative faculty of the poet—the "maker." The framework of "The Newcomes" would include three or four of Balzac's most elaborate books, which, compared with it, indeed, seem like studies and episodes, lacking the large body and ample current of Thackeray's epic. And its epic scale is preserved, not in mechanically assembled examples of different kinds of mere existence, high and

low, savage and civilized, but in a picture of life itself flowering variously in varied characters and circles and communities, closely connected by the cousinly bond of the humanity they possess in common.

Taken as a whole, it is true, Thackeray's human comedy is less comprehensive than Balzac's, with which alone it is to be compared in the world of prose fiction. Taken as a whole, it lacks that appearance of vastness and variety which Balzac's has, and perhaps the appearance in such a matter answers as well as the reality. Considered, that is to say, purely as a world of the imagination, Thackeray's is the more circumscribed. But it is born of less travail; it is constructed with the effortless ease of greater spontaneity; its preliminary simplification has been carried farther; and, if less complicated and ingenious, less speculative and suggestive, it is far more real. Its philosophy is more human, more winning, more attaching, and in a very deep sense more profound. The note of artificiality, the fly in Balzac's ointment, the weak point in his superb equipment, never appears in Thackeray. His charm is infinitely greater. His power is rendered at least equivalent by its conjunction with the simplicity that Balzac lacks. And his narrower range is perhaps to be ascribed to his lesser absorption, perhaps to the less varied and more conventional world that he had to depict. At any rate, it proceeds from no inferiority to his great contemporary and compeer in native equipment and vital force for the specific

work of the novelist — the portrayal of the play of human forces, inspired and directed by searching scrutiny of the human heart.

V

THACKERAY is said to have remarked of himself that he had no head above his eyes. It might be contended that with such eyes as his he needed none. But the statement is misleading. It is true that he had no talent for abstract thinking, for abstruse philosophy. But to assume that he has no philosophy would be to ignore the significance of one of the most definite and complete syntheses of human phenomena that have ever been made, and a synthesis, moreover, incomparably buttressed by the acutest analysis and the most copious illustration. He does not stimulate thought, in the sense of speculation, so much as he arouses reflection. His ideas are moral ideas rather than metaphysical—the ideas for which Voltaire eulogized English poetry. And he deals with them powerfully, cogently, winningly, rather than refining upon them and following out their evolution as a disinterested exercise of the mind. They are the ideas, too, that inspire human motives and govern human action in familiar life and in the individual, that contribute to the making or unmaking of character—his chief preoccupation—rather than to the development of the intelligence. He is not a sociologist like Bal-

zac; he is not interested in currents and movements of thought; he is not devoted to what are called general ideas as such. Matthew Arnold calls the Master of Ravenswood "by far the most interesting of Scott's characters because the spirit of fatality seems to set its mark on him from the first." Thackeray's reference to this rather invertebrate personage is, "I have never cared for the Master of Ravenswood or fetched his hat out of the water since he dropped it there when I last met him (*circa* 1825)." Nothing could better illustrate two opposite ways of looking at the world of life and art. The concrete illustration of ideas in character is what interests Thackeray and what he interests us with. But in this his interest and his power of interesting us are hardly to be measured. When he is called a "realist" something more is — consciously or vaguely — meant than that his novels are pictures of life rather than classic or romantic compositions. It is meant that his philosophy is realistic — that is to say, based on the data furnished by the perceptive faculties, faculties which in his case, it cannot be too often repeated, were of amazing sharpness. There is no missing the tenor of his gospel, which is that character is the one thing of importance in life; that it is tremendously complex, and the easiest thing in the world to misconceive both in ourselves and in others; that truth is the one instrument of its perfecting, and the one subject worthy of pursuit; and that the study of truth discloses littlenesses and futilities in it at its

best for which the only cloak is charity, and the only consolation and atonement the cultivation of the affections.

"There is life and death going on in everything, truth and lies always at battle. Pleasure is always warring against self-restraint; doubt is always crying 'Pshaw!' and sneering. A man in life, a humorist in writing about life, sways over to one principle or the other and laughs with the reverence for right and the love of truth in his heart, or laughs at these from the other side. . . . I cannot help telling the truth as I view it, and describing what I see. To describe it otherwise than it seems to me would be falsehood to that calling in which it has pleased Heaven to place me, treason to that conscience which says that men are weak, that truth must be told, that fault must be owned, that pardon must be prayed for, and that love reigns supreme over all."

That is Thackeray's philosophy in small compass. There is nothing very new about it. It is as old,

> "Here at St. Peter's of Cornhill,
> As yonder on the Mount of Hermon."

It is simply the natural truth underlying the dogma and informing the spirit of Christianity. The force that overthrew the civilization of the ancient world was certainly an overwhelming movement of spiritual feeling, and since then philosophy has had to reckon, at all events, with the soul as well as with the mind.

If Thackeray had no head above his eyes, he had at least a heart below them, and the fact is a controlling influence in his philosophy. "Sure love *vincit omnia*," exclaims Colonel Esmond in a familiar passage, and the principle is everywhere fundamental in Thackeray's "realistic" scheme of things—not love between the sexes necessarily, nor particularly in any of its manifestations, but love as the universal principle to which true salvation is inseparably attached. Humor is "wit and love," in his definition. Love is the inspiration of the "awe" and "reverence" and "tenderness" he is constantly celebrating, of the humility and simplicity he incarnates in his winning characters, as the lack of it is the weakness of his reprehensible ones. He revolts from Swift because he "placards himself as a professional hater of his own kind . . . the suffering, the weak, the erring, the wicked, if you will, but still the friendly, the loving children of God our Father." Although quarrelling with Dickens's art "a thousand and a thousand times," as he says, he recognizes in Dickens's genius "a commission from that divine beneficence whose blessed task we know it will one day be to wipe every tear from every eye." Hood's "Song of the Shirt" is to him "a great act of charity to the world." His gospel is Voltaire's apotheosis of good sense, plus heart. If his good sense is not as cheery and unfailing as Voltaire's, if fault and weakness were ever present with him, and, humanly speaking, the futility of all things impresses him more

deeply than it does minds of perfect sanity, if there is a touch of melancholy in his mirth and the temperamental reaction follows the indulgence of his highest spirits, he regains his philosophic equilibrium always by instinctive reference to his just as clearly perceived principle of the love which, as he says, "reigns supreme over all." It is open to any one to object to this philosophy as trite, but it is at least a philosophy, and Thackeray's philosophic force and originality consist in his rediscovering it for himself, in his making it his own in virtue of basing his adherence to it on his own experience and observation, in the sureness of his reliance upon it after an absolutely candid and wonderfully searching examination of the data of human life, and in the convincing eloquence with which his inductions therefrom bring its soundness and sweetness home to the thinking reader.

VI

WHATEVER judgment of Thackeray's art and substance proves final, there is no doubt that the contemporary verdict of his style will stand. "Thackeray is not, I think, a great writer," Matthew Arnold observed, but at any rate his style is that of one. What a great writer is, in his view, Arnold has formulated in his remark that "the problem is to express new and profound ideas in a perfectly sound and classical style," and his refusal to recognize in Addison a writer of the

first rank is based on "the commonplace of his ideas." It is idly possible to call Thackeray's ideas commonplace, but his style is at all events perfectly sound and classical. It is not the style of Burke, whom Arnold calls "our greatest English prose-writer"—probably because, together with his incomparable style, Burke's distinction is, as he says, that he saturates politics with thought. It is, however, far more perfectly sound and classical. Burke's elevation does not wholly save his style from that tincture of rhetoric which is the vice of English style in general—that rhetorical color which is so clearly marked in the contentious special pleading of Macaulay, in the exaltation of Carlyle, in the rhapsody of Ruskin, in the periodic stateliness of Gibbon, and even in the dignity of Jeremy Taylor. Thackeray's is as destitute of this element as Swift's or Addison's, with which, of course, it is rather to be compared. Rhetoric means the obvious ordering of language with a view to effect—when it does not spring from the elementary desire simply to relieve one's mind; and the great merit of the Queen Anne writers—from whom Thackeray derives—is their freedom from this element of artistic mediocrity. It is to this turn for elegance rather than rhetoric—as unfortunate perhaps in its poetry as beneficial in its prose—that the Queen Anne age owes its epithet Augustan. Thackeray is undoubtedly to be classed with the world's elegant writers—the writers of whom Virgil may stand as the type and exemplar, the writers who demand and require cultiva-

tion in the reader in order to be understood and enjoyed. "Nobody in our day wrote, I should say, with such perfection of style," Carlyle affirmed, and, as Thackeray observes of Gibbon's praise of Fielding, "there can be no gainsaying the sentence of this great judge," in such a matter. His taste is sure. In this respect some of his writing is like a page of Plato. One may feel shortcomings, but at its best it is without faults. The vulgarian can see that it is flawless, lacking as it may be in the glitter or the rhythm that excites his imagination and quickens his pulse.

Among all its traits simplicity has, no doubt, the most relief. It has the simplicity that attends the expression of any natural gift for the expression of which the artist who possesses it seems, as we say, expressly born. It is the simplicity of both birth and breeding, and it is in virtue of it that Thackeray is so often said to write like a gentleman. This is the way in which every one should write, one reflects, just as the discerning but unlearned critic desired all painters to paint with the directness of Titian. It is the opposite, in this respect, of what we mean by the professional style. Its repetitions are not mannerisms. They are the natural expression of the idea and recurrent with it. The language shares the felicity of the thought and fuses with it, instead of lending the thought a felicity of its own. One enjoys the limpidity of Arnold, the liquidness of Newman, as evident properties of the medium in which they write, but in Thackeray

you are less conscious of the medium. His language produces the effect of richness by its fulness rather than by scrupulous selection of epithet and the effort after plasticity. It always has this peculiar sense of fulness, of words overflowing from an exhaustless store, of expressions natively combined. Its ease is absolutely effortless. It is like Raphael's line. He can make it say anything he chooses, anything his characters choose in their several dialects. In the words of a recent writer, himself conspicuously endowed in point of style, Mr. Max Beerbohm: "He blew on his pipe, and words came tripping round him, like children, like pretty little children who are perfectly drilled for the dance; or came, did he will it, treading in their precedence, like kings, gloomily." The measure of his style is not the result of restriction, but the contained expression of native reserve. In passages of most concentrated feeling, such as Esmond's tirade to the prince at Castlewood, it is as free as when it is employed in leisurely narrative. It not only never forces the note of declamation or dithyramb, but it never runs away with the writer and leads him on into exercise of his gift for its own delectability. It follows closely the play of his mind instead of itself ever fascinating his fancy. And though its most notable trait is simplicity—its sensitive avoidance of the meretricious, its elegance, in a word—what gives it its unique distinction is its color.

And its color is directly derived from the constant and active influence of the personality of the writer.

In Thackeray's case the style is eminently the man. Addison's elegance is the elegance of colorlessness. Swift's directness and power are clothed in a garb whose simplicity eschews the play of personal quality in any highly developed texture. Eighteenth-century standards discountenanced idiosyncratic expression. But idiosyncratic expression is the marked distinction of Thackeray's style, which translates his mood as directly as his thought and expresses how he feels as well as what he thinks. It has had imitators, but to imitate it any one must assume, for the time being, Thackeray's frame of mind and sentimental attitude, just as to speak French well it is necessary to think like a Frenchman. And its imitators have been few in number and not lucky in preserving much personal force of their own—so completely has their imitation involved the merging of their personalities in that of their model, the overmastering quality of which as an element of style is thus eloquently attested. The variety and range of his style, which are extraordinary, answer exactly to the range and variety of his own thought and feeling and share his extraordinary vitality and interest in all sides of every subject. No one has so light a touch and no one can stir us so deeply, leaving the nerves unassailed. He speaks happily of "a flash of Swift's lightning," or "a gleam of Addison's pure sunshine" extinguishing the "tawdry play-house taper" of Congreve. But he himself combines flashes of lightning, gleams of pure sunshine—yes, and very pretty

play-house illumination now and then — in virtue of a wider interest and quicker sympathies than these Augustan worthies possessed. And not only is he himself the source of the color of his style: he is the source also of its sustained quality. His style is adapted to the largest as well as to cabinet canvases because it is the natural expression of his own largeness of view and depth of feeling, instead of being the result of some rhetorical penchant, or the anxious education of illustrating some idea of energy, clearness, cogency, or whatnot. No one would ever have wondered of him, as Jeffrey did of Macaulay, where he "picked up" his style. Like his art and like the world of his imagination, it is an outgrowth of the most interesting personality, perhaps, that has expressed itself in prose.

CARLYLE

CARLYLE

I

When Carlyle died, over twenty years ago, he already belonged to the past. His philosophy was of a general order that had ceased to be popular. And he had been long silent. The papers on the Early Norse Kings were unimportant. The last of his utterances that lingered in people's memory were his defence of Eyre, the "Ilias in Nuce," and the "Shooting Niagara and After," recalling the earlier "Latter-Day Pamphlets." The impression they left was not an agreeable one, and it was hardly modified by the amenity and gentleness of his Edinburgh Address, in which he apologized very simply for the tone of some of them, though asserting still that they were "very deeply my convictions." In this country especially he had few friends. With us in general he seemed, as he was long ago described, "the leading prophet of Absolutism, Toryism, Slavery." We had issued from what he called our "nigger agony" in a mood that hardly stimulated us to the difficult effort of impartially appreciating one who had contemptuously misunderstood us—not indeed feeling such an effort very incumbent on us. But neither here nor in

England probably was the public prepared for the revelations of Froude that so promptly followed—the depressing "Reminiscences," as if they had been waiting for the signal—upon Carlyle's death. The "Reminiscences" and the volumes that succeeded them gave, in many quarters apparently, the *coup de grâce* to Carlyle's vogue. Vogue of their own they notoriously had in a true *succès de scandale*, and Carlyle's friends could only denounce his chosen executor and biographer. But this was of course extremely transient, and the result was an immense weariness with the whole subject. Carlyle's own writings fell speedily into a neglect as complete probably as has ever happened to a writer of anything like his power.

The neglect has continued. Such questions as have occupied popular attention are either not questions on which Carlyle's works have any particular and specific bearing—questions of art, of poetry, of science; or else they are questions invariably discussed on lines and in a spirit wholly foreign to his. It is the day of the specialist, whose syntheses are left to spontaneous combination; of the realist, whose material is also his end; of the practical philosopher, who relegates the services of the deductive method to pure metaphysic. Creeds, too, in Mr. Leslie Stephen's acute phrase, are "expiring of explanation," and therefore to point out their essential residuum is a less pungent proceeding than when it seemed as if this residuum were certain to share their fate in the absence of vigorous protest. Much of what

Carlyle wrote, the gospel that he expounded so contentiously and polemically, has now become a part of what we now call our subliminal possessions. What once seemed, and of course still is, elemental, has become elementary as well. And literary manners, as they may be termed, have undergone a notable transformation and the taste for contentiousness and polemics, especially in the exposition of the elementary, has largely disappeared. Criticism itself has become largely impersonal and anything like a body of doctrine in a critic's works seems if novel an impertinence, and if familiar mere surplusage, to a public that, whether wiser or more superficial, has grown greatly more civilized.

It is, however, difficult to believe that the current neglect of Carlyle will continue indefinitely. For whatever else may be said about it, his work is *literature.* In the first place, its style must be preservative, as style always is in a very considerable degree. The "Spectator," for example, will always be read, though not for the reasons that recommended it to Macaulay. And whimsical and artificial as Carlyle's style is, at least in excess, it is too vital not to be viable. It is idle to suppose that the current impassiveness, which has succeeded to the earlier impatience with his eccentricities and violences, will endure in the presence of such prose as distinguishes the "Life of Sterling" throughout, the "Past and Present" largely, and, in parts, especially the "Sartor Resartus." In

the next place, it is hardly to be supposed that such a sustained exposition, at once symmetrical and multifarious, of the spiritual side of things, such a prolonged eulogy and aggrandizement of the spiritual forces of life and the world, is likely to suffer permanent eclipse. As the English-reading public becomes more and more civilized, more curious, less emotional, the energy which in Carlyle's early days attracted it and which later in the light of its own advance seemed to it mere savagery, will drop into its proper perspective and be appreciated without the agitation inseparable from contemporary contemplation of anything so accentuated as Carlyle's indubitable genius. For, finally, his genius is incontestable, and it is a genius of incomparable power. His work is everywhere penetrated with the power of a prodigious personality of which the literature he produced is the native, adequate, concentrated and consummate expression. Such a sovereign force must survive the current neglect which its extravagances have nevertheless abundantly earned for it.

II

It is curious to read in Froude's biography of the confidence in his powers felt by Carlyle himself, and shared by every one around him years before he had done anything to justify it. His wife married him, she says, "for ambition," when his career was all before him and when the little that he had accomplished was

altogether disproportionate to the time he had been about it. His family, one and all, looked up to him even when he was a very young man, and although they could not understand him and were not of a sort to be impressed by any literary glamour. From his early days till very nearly the end of his life he was the centre of every group he happened to be in. He was a prodigious talker, and on occasion drowned opposition, but in general every one else was content to listen to him. He met intimately nearly all the best men of his day and his personal primacy was never disputed. Every one felt his power as extraordinary and as something other than force. There was apparently nothing he could not grasp, if he would. His views on all sorts of subjects were delivered with acknowledged *ex cathedra* authority. The authority of others, even the highest, failed to impose itself on him. From the first he judged men, even the most celebrated, not only with perfect independence, but with the confidence born of the consciousness of unusual powers. The personalities that he venerated were exclusively historic—excepting Goethe, who was a foreigner. He had no deference—except for what was wholly outside of competition with him; his father's character, for example. Awe and reverence for the Creator and His universe considered as a stupendous miracle left him free to alternate compassion with contempt for His creatures.

There are few of even the greatest men in whom

such conspicuous conceit has been so curiously condoned. His confidence in his capacities, however his expression may now and then have failed to please him, is in a way an attestation of them. It imposes on us. One feels that had it been less justified it would have been less keenly felt. He was quite sincere about it and his penetration is acute enough to trust even about himself. But it is plainly too much in evidence. At times his self-satisfaction is positively smug. And it is responsible for much popular and unreflecting disesteem of him. The conventional reader to whom modesty is the invariable concomitant of merit, strong in his commonplaces, shakes his head sceptically. The "Reminiscences" and Froude's volumes quite scandalized him. The "Reminiscences" are, indeed, a revelation of self-esteem and depreciation of others that it would be hard to equal. A single remark like that about "The Origin of Species," which Carlyle says illustrated for him only "the capricious stupidity of mankind; never could read a page of it or waste the least thought upon it," is a sufficient characterization of them in this respect.

Neither humor nor dyspepsia can explain or excuse the outrageousness of much of his writings of which such a statement is typical. What does explain it is the extraordinary self-consciousness with which his conceit is associated — his egoism. Egoism was never, perhaps, illustrated in such completeness, such perfection. He himself quite as eminently deserved the

epithet "poor, skinless creature" that he applied to Rousseau. "Perhaps none of you could do what I am doing," he reflects bitterly, viewing the Hyde Park procession of dignities. The observation was true enough, but why was it not too trite for him to make and to record? It is the railing of the peasant at the patrician panorama. Even in his most objective writings he never gets away from himself. His personality confuses his history. You are never allowed to escape from it. It is obtrusive, exasperating, domineering. The simplest record is complicated with his view of the facts. In his "Frederick," for example, he divides attention with his hero; he is incessantly—wearisomely—parading his views, preaching his gospel, even complaining, now humorously, now querulously, always superfluously, of the difficulties of his task; pervading the scene, in short, with his extremely accentuated personality. His ideal of "unconsciousness" in the famous essay on "Characteristics" has its origin, no doubt, in the exasperation of his egoism, which obsessed him and under which he chafed and fretted till soothed by conceit. Introspection irritated him supremely and made him long for the automatic play of faculty, which he accordingly generalized into a millennial principle of mental activity. But his introspection never led him beyond self-consciousness into self-discipline — the compensation which its inevitability in the modern world has for less egoistic spirits. Discipline in thought, feeling, and expression is the one thing he conspicuously neglected.

For with his extraordinary powers and his self-consciousness, wilfulness is certainly to be connected as the next most salient trait of his commanding personality. "The most shining avatar of whim the world has ever seen," Lowell calls him quite truly. Only, "whim" is too extenuated a term—or too depreciatory, if one chooses—to apply to an element of so much energy. His surrender to whim is so voluntary, so absolute, such a sin against light, that to call him merely "our whimsical philosopher," as Mr. John Morley does, is both patronizing and inadequate. With him caprice means not intellectual frivolity, but a temperamental perversity of which he is the willing slave. He will say anything that inclination or even temper suggests to him. "Once more the tragic story of a high endowment with an insufficient will," he says of Coleridge. It is the exaggerated "sufficiency" of his will on the contrary that renders the story of his own high endowment quite as tragic. It is singularly tragic that owing to it the weightiest utterances of his splendid genius should be so often robbed of the intellectual responsibility that alone confers authority.

All this we knew, however, before the revelations of Froude. Froude's fatal contribution to our knowledge of his master is the disclosure of his lovelessness. The genial basis that theretofore might credibly have been inferred beneath the various phases of his contradictory and prevailing "humor" now appears as a certain aridity of soul. One can hardly avoid the con-

clusion—his biographer has so copiously documented his own explicitness about it — that he did not know what love is, that he had never experienced the sensation of it in either its tension or its transports, its energy or its enervation. The remorse in the references to his wife in the "Reminiscences" is so intolerably pathetic because it witnesses in truly fatalistic fashion a fundamental incapacity. His feeling for his family is very fine; but it illustrates a kind of ethnic devotion to the clan and has a side of very subtly vicarious selfishness quite removed from the "leaving of self" that love is. He was naïvely ready to sacrifice his wife to it. He was quite ready in fact to let her go if she had any doubts about her vocation *as* his wife. It is small wonder that philanthropy meant nothing to him, that *service* of any kind did not attract him, that his heroes, however admirable, are never winning. The affections never retarded, deflected, or stimulated him in his steady march to distinction. Distinction, too, was undisguisedly, even professedly, his aim and end, as much as it ever was that of any of his brother Scots who had victoriously invaded the "mad Babylon" of London. It was his "mission"—the whole of it. Only, in achieving it, he never had the slightest temptation to seek it on any terms but his own. Apparently he never had any temptations of any kind. Duty and desire were curiously interconvertible terms to him. He lived a life of ideal integrity, of blameless conduct, of complete consecration to the development.

and functional expression of his extraordinary powers. But his nearest approach to passion is petulance, except when he is occupied with reprehension or reproof. Who ever thinks of "the storms and tempests of his furious mind," or conceives of him as "Miserrimus," or finds that "his laugh jars on one's ear"—as Thackeray says of Swift? His laugh, indeed, however boisterous, was largely reflex, one suspects after reading Froude—genuine enough, no doubt, but hardly "infectious." Passion implies the state of being "beside one's self," and though clearly a Titan, and a wofully wilful one, Carlyle's truly Scotch self-possession is distinctly canny. His temperamental tumultuousness was singularly intellectual. It is his thinking, not himself, that is agitated. He could never, he says, do any long-continued, "decisive intellectual operation" without getting "decidedly made ill by it." And perhaps the exclusiveness with which his mind monopolized his feeling is at once the most characteristic trait of his personality and the most determining characteristic of his work.

III

One of the tragedies of the strenuous intellectual life is the disproportion between its conclusions and their cost. So much struggle in the pursuit of mere simplification, so much apologetics for so concise a credo, such a wide waste of philosophizing for such a circumscribed foothold of faith, such a sea of speculation

through which to reach so narrow a strand of certainty! To arrive at his not complex philosophy Carlyle passed through a prodigious amount of thinking; demon-driven and tempest-tossed in the process. His own account of his abandonment of traditional religious dogmas is acutely pathetic — an account of a Titanic experience with issue of hardly corresponding importance, one may say. It was not a chastening experience. It left him intolerant even to the point of exacting an equivalent one of others, which shows that it had not, in old-fashioned phraseology, been "sanctified to his use." He reproaches Coleridge contemptuously for having merely "skirted the howling deserts of infidelity." His own "firm lands of faith beyond" were substantially Coleridge's country, however. His title to them was really his belief in the superiority of the *Vernunft* or reason to the *Verstand* or understanding, as he often explicitly says; though, unhampered as always by a sense of chivalry, he ridicules it as mere apparatus when his business is to exhibit the vagueness of Coleridge. He resented Coleridge's complacent placidity. The remark that "Socrates is terribly at ease in Zion" is doubtless accurately ascribed to him. He would probably have grumbled at the good fortune of the penitent thief. His own salvation had been so hardly won that he prescribed the purgatory of agonized mental conflict as a preliminary to the paradise of settled conviction. His bitter experience, too, in a measure, explains the vehemence with which he held his con-

victions. They were not very recondite, as I say. Froude's attempt to construct an extraordinary esoteric credo for him, out of some *disjecta* memoranda he had himself discarded, is extraordinarily inept, and reduces to a belief in God and the universe as His expression. "The light of your mind, which is the direct inspiration of the Almighty," is the criterion, indifference to happiness the basis, and "work not wages" the end, of his philosophy.

This substantially sufficed him in the way of philosophical baggage. But the energy with which he preached exclusively this rather exiguous gospel shows that it was the residuum of heroic—and perhaps to most men unnecessary—sacrifices. Energy, however, not intellectual complexity, distinguishes him—energy even more than its direction. He never even addresses the intellect pure and simple. His appeal is to the heart and the soul. For example, in the countless changes he rings upon his central idea of the unworthiness of happiness as a motive—and the eloquence, the convincingness, the fire and intoxicating, magnetic cogency with which he does this gives him his place in the classic pantheon—he never, so far as I remember, calls attention to what is now termed (in a jargon he would scout) the hedonistic paradox. The reasonableness of the statement of this phenomenon by Jesus, "He that loveth his life shall lose it," is quite foreign to the Hebraic spirit of his treatment of the general theme. He does not make you ponder its mystic and

significant import. In fact, he never makes his reader ponder at all. He arouses the sensibilities and the will directly by an energy of pronouncement, adjuration, irony that sets the sympathetic in responsive vibration with the definite ideal of duty, of sacrifice, of performance, of abnegation, so intensely felt and so masterfully set forth.

The traces of his perturbation are to be found, too, in the character of this ideal, which though definite enough is hardly to be called positive. At least, it lacks — tragically — aspiration. Its end, its haven, its heaven is rest, not activity. "That is how I figure Heaven," he said once substantially, "just rest." This is carrying the "Entbehren sollst du" very far, farther than Buddhism, whose inspiration is certainly not fatigue. "Rest" is not even "calm," the partial and temperamental ideal of old age, while youth

> "— hears a voice within it tell:
> Calm's not life's crown, though calm is well."

It implies the weariness of exhaustion, the sense of defeat. As an ideal it is warped by agitation. That it should have appealed so strongly to readers influenced by Carlyle indicates strikingly the demoralization wrought among pious souls by the break-up of the old faiths. But it is still more eloquent witness of the power of his energetic preachment of the irrelevance of the whole matter of reward for duty done. St. Paul's

insistence upon the expectation of immortality and his wish not to have his disciples sorrow "even as others who are without hope" has been much exaggerated. And this expectation itself has been greatly overestimated, probably, as a selfish motive of virtuous performance peculiar to fanaticism and contrasting with Stoic nobility. "It is a calumny on men to say that they are roused to heroic action by ease, hope of pleasure, recompense, sugar-plums of any kind, in this world or the next," says Carlyle of Mahomet's success. "Difficulty, abnegation, martyrdom, death are the *allurements* that act on the heart of man. Kindle the inner genial life of him, you have a flame that burns up all lower considerations." None the less, to have kindled this flame in so many breasts in a rational age, and by preaching the foregoing "allurements" alone, without even recognition of the fact that they carry their recompense with them, and without the elevation and expansion either involved in the *gaudium certaminis* itself or attendant on victory in it here or hereafter, attests wonderfully both the intensity and the kindling quality of the preacher's emotional equipment.

Carlyle's intensity of feeling, however, not only outstrips his thinking and thus itself dies out long before the manifestations of it have lost their momentum, so that these come to seem almost mechanical, often, before they suddenly cease in some "Good Heavens!" or otherwise essentially inarticulate interjection; it is rarely purified into true exaltation. Other great writers

have felt as deeply, as intensely, but the very depth and intensity of their feeling has resulted in that condition of concentrated calm and serene possession in which the mind seems to work with an unaccustomed freedom from the embarrassments and obstacles of less sensitive moments. Carlyle is often turbulent, tumultuous, conscious of his perturbation, impatient of the obstructions of coherent utterance, irritated at the necessity of effort in expression, exacerbated, violent, excessive. Despite his power therefore, which rarely fails to make itself felt, which is always to be either discerned or divined, he is, at times when his intensity of emotion should be both an inspiration and a constraint, its prey rather than its instrument. Thus his mood monopolizes his faculties and hampers quite as often as it stimulates his thought. His effort is absorbed in expressing it and not the ideas which have caused it. The shading of these, their efficacy, their attractiveness, their universal appeal, their relations and suggestions do not entrance him out of himself, but in proportion as they arouse his emotion sting him, as it were, into eloquent and apparently automatic exposition of their effect on him, into excited or contemptuous dithyramb and rhapsody. It is largely this strenuousness, I think, that gives his philosophy its special quality. And its quality conjoined with its character gives it a unique, even an isolated position.

IV

To be out of harmony with one's time and environment is a heavy handicap on energy, which is thus inevitably deflected instead of developed, however it may be intensified by isolation. It is inherently inimical to expansion, and Carlyle may really be said to have devoted his prodigious powers to the endeavor to transform the "epoch of expansion" in which he passed his life into an "epoch of concentration" — to adopt Arnold's terminology. Unaided — or aided only by the futile of the intellectual world, the Froudes, the Kingsleys, the Ruskins — such an attempt must be both transitory and incomplete. "Epochs" are independent of individuals. It is their representative character that singularizes even the Titans of historic changes. Luther, for example, who attracted Carlyle immensely, disproportionately, incarnates the movement of concentration for which he stands, and did not produce it. The Renaissance produced it. It crystallized out of the expiring expansion whose hour was over. The epoch of expansion which Carlyle contested with such eloquence and energy was only beginning. So far as its movement of thought is concerned he never delayed its march an hour. He hardly even modified its evolution. He affected powerfully the varying feeling that accompanied it, but the feeling he aroused, being general, was so largely either absent altogether from the direction of specific practice it took or else impotent to check it,

that this never sensibly stayed its steps. If utilitarianism has run its course it is in notable degree because its programme has been accomplished. If the world of thought was at all times insufficiently filled by it and ideality flourished synchronously with ever-increasing vigor, this was not because of Carlyle's direct contributions to the latter, but because the ideality of his day took advantage of his spiritual quickening in the development of its own spiritual philosophy, very different from his. Nor is the current reaction which Liberalism in the exasperation of its discomfiture would fain attribute to Carlyle's miscalled Gospel of Force, so attributable. The apologetics of the current gospel of force — in whose persistence, one may remark, too, in passing, nobody believes — are wholly at variance with the Eternal Verities and Immensities, the heroisms and scorn of hedonism which form the basis of his Berserker credo.

In a word, no writer who has so stirred the moral or other emotions of his era has ever remained so foreign to its thought or so out of harmony with its spirit as exhibited in its specific aspirations. Specifically the two supreme influences of the nineteenth century have been the scientific and the democratic spirit. And each found in Carlyle an instinctive and a deliberate antagonist. Science he neglected, democracy he decried; both he enthusiastically and at times ridiculously despised — as indeed he did everything he did not like. Science, apparently, except the abstract science of mathematics, he knew nothing about. At thirty he

was, in Froude's view, the best-read man in England. For many years, at any rate, he had done little or nothing but read. His knowledge of history, of language, of literature was immense. It was, moreover—need it be said?—assimilated knowledge. Compare even such elementary and cursory evidence as the extempore "Lectures on the History of Literature" with even Hallam. But with science there is no witness of his having a speaking acquaintance. What he read of economics probably only served to whet his exasperation: from his point of view the abstraction of the so-called "economic man" was inherently trivial, and his impatience found the relief of relaxation in deriding, without examination, the "dismal" and "beaver" sciences based on an interest which not only he did not share but which, on the contrary, actively irritated him. Similarly with the natural sciences to which so much of the best intellect of the time has been consecrated, which have had such a prodigious influence in the amelioration of the lot of man and which have so markedly shifted the very foundations of mankind's speculations, beliefs, and activities—foundations upon which it is within the truth to say a new *literature* has arisen. But it is not his ignorance of science that so much distinguishes his position as out of focus with his day and generation. Other writers have been conspicuously ignorant of it, too, without losing their authority. Literature has often been very nobly independent of it, much even of the literature of

our own time. On the other hand attention to it has sometimes not particularly served the larger purpose of literature, as, for example, with George Eliot; or else has served it only to give it an unsatisfying and conventional currency, as with Tennyson. And Carlyle's insight is so penetrating and clairvoyant that often it easily dispenses with its aid. *This* peasant Scotch Covenanter did not need to wait for the sanctions of the "Higher Criticism" in order to write his essay on Voltaire. His isolation and antagonism are mainly emphasized in this regard by his lack not of knowledge of nineteenth-century science, but of the *scientific spirit* itself which is so eminent a mark of his century.

The scientific spirit signifies poise between hypothesis and verification, between statement and proof, between appearance and reality. It is inspired by the impulse of investigation tempered with distrust and edged with curiosity. It is at once avid of certainty and sceptical of seeming. Mirage does not fascinate, nor blankness dispirit it. It is enthusiastically patient, nobly literal, candid, tolerant, hospitable. It has no major proposition to advocate or defend, no motive beyond that of attestation. It shrinks from temerity in assertion at the same time that it is animated with the ardor of divination. It is, in a word, the antithesis of such a spirit as Carlyle's, which deduces with confidence from conceptions vividly apprehended but never limited in thought, intensely imagined but neither

scrupulously examined nor rigidly defined. The distinction is not one of practice, between *a priori* and inductive mental processes. The scientific spirit has certainly as much need of one as of the other, but it dictates the testing of its initial syntheses and holds the revelations of its "immediate beholdings" to be guesswork until tried by the surer standards of the "logical understanding." It has its weak side, inherently as well as in excess. Hamilton's assertion that a mathematician should be a poet implies an ideal not often, perhaps, attained. But in greater or less dilution it has supplied a tonic force in the speculation, the philosophy, and the art of the present day, a stimulus conspicuously lacking in the writings of Carlyle, which sag, in consequence, often into the vague and the questionable.

Even more than the scientific spirit, democracy has characterized the age of Carlyle, and it is its democracy chiefly that makes him ill at ease in it. He lived to see it run its course perhaps as an abstract ideal, but this was because practically the century had become interpenetrated with it. His own bitter denunciations of it in principle—of course he never denounced or advocated anything except in principle—had little or no weight. The reaction he preached was taken by his day for the "moonshine" which he termed its own convictions. That democracy has failed in the exalted mission with which the eighteenth century charged it, that as a panacea its inefficiency has become evident,

that it has developed unexpected weakness apparently inherent in its own scheme, that instead of radically revolutionizing society it has itself been modified in many ways in the course of its evolution, that it has proved a disappointment to such writers as Scherer and Lecky, does not obscure the fact that it is the working hypothesis of the world. Dithyramb in its praise is doubtless out of date, but it has not given place to dithyramb in its censure. To Carlyle, however, it was equally abhorrent in theory and in practice, idiotic in idea and in fact inexecutable. To him it essentially contravened the order of nature, the immutable law of the universe. He hated it instinctively. And from his aversion, one may suspect, he deduced his categorical principles of a spiritual cohesion of society, obliterating the independence of its units, the right of the wise and energetic to rule, the right of the foolish and weak to be ruled—his mediævalism, in a word.

No one has made mediævalism more attractive. "Past and Present" is a very notable book. The reconstitution of mediæval life in the picture he makes out of the Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond is vivid and telling—especially telling in contrast with certain sides of modern life with its "thirty thousand distressed needlewomen in London alone" and its "cash payment the sole nexus between men." The book is, of course, inspired by the desire of exhibiting this contrast—a desire which, of course, impairs its veracity. It

is in fact a pamphlet. Along with the spiritual unity and interdependence of mediævalism—"Gurth was hired for life to Cedric and Cedric to Gurth"—went many qualifications of human felicity which Carlyle's partisanship neglects to note, and which are easily enough catalogued. But it is not so much his partisanship, his lack of the scientific spirit, as the anti-democratic feeling that dictates his feudalism, and made his preachment of it fall on deaf ears. He liked feudalism because it meant the imposition of the strong upon the weak will, because during the day of its supremacy the people were least alive, because force was focussed in personalities, because the mediocre in all departments of activity was sacrificed to the salient, because mind—which he testily despised—had the least protection against purpose, because in every way it contrasted with the democratic differentiation of his antagonistic time. The only aspect of the French Revolution that pleased him was not the rise of the democracy but the punishment of the *noblesse*. For its ideas he cared not a straw. He was even blind to them. The Revolution, which Arnold calls "the greatest, the most animating event in history," was in his view merely a moral judgment for the rejection of the Reformation two centuries before. He never felt the slightest interest, the least curiosity, in "the people," in any epoch. The democratic ideal, however theoretic it may have been, democratic philosophy, however rational and disillusioned it may have become, are in-

separable from humanitarianism and humanitarianism was itself antipathetic to Carlyle. Witness "Model Prisons" for a single example. Man as man meant nothing to him. The dignity of human nature he regarded with truly Calvinistic derision. The "divine" element monopolized him. He even manufactured at need incarnations of it. Hence his doctrine of heroes, his view of history as the biography of great men, his exaltation of the exceptional personality.

Here again his undemocratic feeling sets him aside from the current and movement of his time. History is now the history of peoples. Its heroes are resultants of popular forces, movements, phases. They are explained, not "sent by God." Even literature conceives them in this way. There is a striking contrast not only in the treatment but in the titles of "Heroes and Hero Worship" and Emerson's "Representative Men." Emerson was saturated with true democratic feeling. It was a constituent of his refinement. His heroes are, in the words he cites from Sterling:

> "Our nobler brothers, though one in blood."

Carlyle's are exhibited in the strongest relief. The darker the time, the greater the hero. And his preference for the darkest time, the most legendary hero, is significant. The result is a kind of falsification of historic color, to say the least. Really his hero is often admirable only because his environment is not — Odin,

for instance, and Mahomet. Yet by a curious confusion he glorifies the stern times that could produce the hero, merely because they have produced him. One feels that the train of thought is a little insipid. Hence an aggrandizement of the Norse twilight with its rude figures over the diffused day of Greece and its community of pleasanter personifications. Olympus is too democratic for him, there is too much freedom, too much individuality, as well as the lack of solemnity involved in less gloom. Even in mythology his instinctive preference for energy to light appears. In mythology, however, one may indulge his preferences. To treat the graver matters of history, and social and political philosophy with mediæval hostility to the vital force of the modern world and without its scientific spirit, is too antagonistic to the current of modern thought to be convincing to modern men, and too particular to have, even abstractly, the cogency of utterance that is in harmony with the tone and rhythm of one's own time.

V

Of course, in noting his tendency to make of history a series of biographies, I do not mean to assert that in theory Carlyle altogether and implicitly denied the representative character of his heroes. Quite the contrary is the case, although explicitly he derides the disposition to call the hero the "creature of the Time" and exclaims: "The Time call forth? Alas, we have

known Times *call* loudly enough for their great man; but not find him when they called!" But this representative character of theirs he assumes and never so much as attempts to demonstrate. In strict *a priori* fashion he infers often that they not only represent but incarnate the spirit of their time, which thenceforth he sees only as mirrored in their personalities. In practice therefore his concentration upon them becomes a study of idiosyncrasy instead of typical qualities. His instinct interests him in them in proportion to the strength of their individuality, and this is often the measure of their *un*representativeness. The same plebeian antagonism to democratic feeling that leads him to consider the spirit of the time as negligible except as incarnated in the hero, leads him inevitably to magnify the hero in his purely personal and particular character. Thus, for example, his admiration of Johnson is based on his worshipping according to the old formulas in St. Clement Danes every Sunday in the age of Voltaire; though for his attempt to rationalize the same old formulas he has nothing but ridicule for Coleridge. In every instance, we perceive, what really interests him is *character*, and character in itself, in proportion to its energy, intrinsically and not representatively at all. Thus, practically speaking, Carlyle's history is apt to be history just in so far as his heroes are truly representative, and history, moreover, that is indirectly and not directly illuminating. In writing of such a character as Loyola, for example, his historical sense is merged

in the passion of the pamphleteer. Ignatius's personality attracted him as an artist — attracted him virulently, one may say. But on the Catholic reaction, which is one of the most interesting and significant movements of history, and which is in a sense identical with Ignatius, it simply never occurs to him to throw any light whatever.

This reserve made, however, his history is often wonderfully illuminating because of this very absorption in character, which leads him to excessive and exclusive interest in the element of personality. This interest of itself implies a moral rather than a purely intellectual preoccupation, a superior concern for the heart and the soul, a quick feeling for the *sentiment* of a time, which when it is sympathetically, is therefore truly, interpreted. That is to say, divination discloses it as mere inspection cannot. And the sentiment of a time is, measurably speaking, the time itself. Accordingly, when Carlyle is in harmony with his epoch, his treatment of it, though never impartial and often excessive, is, through the very quality which in other circumstances is a defect — his predominant interest in character, namely, and in the forces which constitute character, moral forces rather than ideas — vitally and centrally irradiating. No one has praised this inner method of Carlyle better than the external Taine. He calls it "a new fashion of writing history," and he goes on as follows: "Man is not an inert being, moulded by a constitution, nor a lifeless being expressed by a for-

mula; he is an active and living soul, capable of acting, discovering, creating, devoting himself, and before all of daring: genuine history is an epic of heroism. This idea is, in my opinion, as it were a brilliant light. For men have not done great things without great emotions." Carlyle himself says the same thing in saying that Puritanism "came forth as a *real business of the heart.*" For the exhibition of such when it was to him a sympathetic business he had an extraordinary aptitude. His exhibition of it then is extraordinarily vivid. "Grave constitutional histories hang heavy after this compilation," says Taine of the "Cromwell." It is also extraordinarily luminous and searching. In the "Cromwell," Taine continues, "I can touch the truth itself."

Everything, however, in this latter respect depends upon the sufficiency of the historian's sympathy. The French Revolution, though far more a matter of the head than the Puritan, was also "a real business of the heart." Carlyle's panorama of it is, at least in sustained passages such as the "Taking of the Bastille," of epic vividness and even grandeur. Pictorially — rather, I think, than in a true literary sense — it is strictly incomparable. But the truth of it! The truth is not simply altogether missed, as it might be by an historian of political or other formulary: it is deeply perverted. It is wholly misconceived by antagonism, by a hostility which is merely the complement of those Puritan predilections that make his "Cromwell" so sympathetic an interpretation. "Carlyle judges the Revolution,"

says Taine again, "as unjustly as he judges Voltaire, and for the same reasons. He understands our manner of acting no better than our manner of thinking. . . . Generosity and enthusiasm abounded in France as well as in England; acknowledge them under a form which is not English. These men were devoted to abstract truth, as the Puritan to divine truth; they followed philosophy as the Puritan followed religion; they had for their aim universal salvation, as the Puritan had individual salvation. They fought against evil in society, as the Puritan fought it in the soul. They were generous as the Puritans were virtuous. They had, like them, a heroism, but sympathetic, sociable, ready to proselytize, which reformed Europe, while the English one only served England."

There is no escaping from the justice of this judgment, and it is a terribly severe one. The words I have cited contain more candor in making distinctions where distinctions are of vital, of absolute, importance, than is to be found in all Carlyle's works. Plainly the inner method serves the historian ill—pillories him, indeed—if it is not applied by an imagination which can divine phenomena lying without the confines of its temperamental prejudices. It is not sufficient for him to place himself at the very centre of another's standpoint; he must perform this feat when the other standpoint is a different, or even a hostile one—the faculty for which was denied to Carlyle as completely as if he had been devoid of all imagination whatever. The

"Fritziad" illustrates the fact less strikingly than the "French Revolution," but it illustrates it amply. And in the essay on Voltaire this appears not incidentally and as the vitiating element of a work otherwise important, but as the source of a direct and positive piece of sustained if unconscious calumny.

VI

He was certainly an artist—to the point, indeed, which makes it possible to say that he is quite misconceived if the plastic element in his composition is not prominently considered. He cared nothing whatever for art. It escaped him altogether. When he did not neglect, he insulted it. "May the devil fly away with the fine arts," he quotes sympathetically from some enlightened authority or other — perhaps, *more suo*, supposititious. It had for him the curious moral connotation it might have had for his Covenanter ancestry had they known of its existence. His rare admirations are childish — for example, the feeble Dante fresco portrait once ascribed to Giotto, his interpretation of which is as absurd as anything in Ruskin, and, in another way, the puerile picture of "The Little Drummer," in which Frederick figures as a child. His praise of Dante's "song" is inferred from his appreciation of its burden, not due to a feeling for its wonderful integumental music. Froude says his ear was deficient and his metrical experiments a failure, which is true enough in general, though the translation

of Goethe's noble verses in "Past and Present" is adequate and even moving. But any appeal purely to the æsthetic faculty he suspected, and whatever he suspected, of course, he either derided or denounced. It is singular that this does not qualify his worship of Goethe.

His lack of æsthetic appreciation, however, neither obscures nor obstructs his striking powers of artistic expression. He made his own picture, to which everything he saw was contributory material, and he was so egoistic that the combinations of others did not interest him. And his picture is always sapiently, *savamment*, constructed. You may like the technic or not, but the effect—and the effect evidently preconceived, arranged, combined—is not to be denied. His praise of unconsciousness is, as I have already said, manifestly a reaction from the discomfort and often the misery with which his extremely conscious composition was attended. No writer ever thought more of *how* he was to do whatever he did. His journal records that he sat three days before the sheet of paper at the top of which the word "Voltaire" was written before writing a line of his famous essay. Certainly, during that time, he was not thinking what to say. And his effect is always the supremely artistic effect of totality. In an elaborate work, as in an essay, the sense of the whole prevails with truly organic persistence in even the most individualized parts. His purpose is always an informing purpose, and his aim the single one at-

tained by a convergence of the most multifarious means. His art satisfies abundantly such definitions as: "The answer to the question, How?" "The adaptation of means to ends," even "The interpenetration of the object with its ideal."

A moment's reflection will assure any one of this. When we recall "Sartor," "Heroes," "Past and Present," "The French Revolution," or the ten volumes of "Frederick," it is a single impression that we recall. This is true of even the "Latter-Day Pamphlets," which, in spite of their variety of subjects — "Stump Orator," "Jesuitism," "Model Prisons," etc.— leave the definite sensation of a prolonged and scarcely modulated shriek. Mr. Lowell complains of "The French Revolution" that it is a series of "brilliant flashes," and that we get no "general view." The *narrative* is episodical, if one chooses, but the *picture* is composed from the centre, and its unity is conspicuous; pictorially, the difficulty is that we get nothing *but* a "general view." "Frederick" is a masterpiece of concentric and centripetal miscellany. The technic is here and there deplorable, there are waste places and bits over-elaborated, details summarily treated and others caressed out of all proportion. But when the immense size of the canvas and the heterogeneity of the subject are taken into consideration, the way in which the central figure is at once made to stand out in accentuated individuality and at the same time intimately connected with related figures and events remote or near at hand, the result seems a

marvel of artistic unity. It might surely have been better done. Herculean as the labor Carlyle undertook in it is, he undertook it, and in strictness should have performed it, instead of punctuating it with complaints of its onerousness and overloading it with unconformed data and disquisition. But it is a notable work of art.

The "Cromwell" is on the other hand superbly done. It is in its kind unique. The way in which Cromwell is allowed to paint himself, issuing himself as it were for the first time from the lumber of effigies theretofore constructed of him, is unsurpassed in artistic vigor. It is compassed, too, by the subordination of stimulant commentary to the main business in hand — a circumstance that, however illuminating the method, must, in the case of so aggressive an advocate as Carlyle, be taken as eloquent witness of his controlling genius for real effectiveness. Had he been content with a less striking impression, so strenuous a personality as his would not, in the whole plan and scope of his work, have so markedly yielded the centre of the stage. He certainly recouped himself somewhat in the *entr'actes;* and the "Cromwell" is his single performance of the kind. In general his art is disfigured by the converse of such æsthetic altruism, by caprice, the caprice of his temperament. But his deficiency as an artist is deeper than anything temperamental — deeper than excess, even, or the defiance of that discipline of genius which art has been called. It is his carelessness of perfection, his insensitiveness to beauty, his in-

difference to quality in his work. If he thought much how to do a thing, he thought little of how to do it well — well, that is to say, in correspondence with any classic standard or any ideal of power implying restraint. His devotion to expression was too absolute to be qualified by restraint, and nothing else, of course, will exorcise excess, the essential foe of formal excellence. The inspiration of those passages in his works that are truly beautiful is moral not æsthetic feeling — the noble and affecting fragment on the death of Edward Irving, for example. The "Life of Sterling," which is a masterpiece of contained expression, of sustained style and of admirable workmanship, which is his most finished production, and which may stand as a model biography in just those qualities that ordinarily his caprice is fatal to — the "Life of Sterling" is inspired by the desire to free his friend's memory from the misconceptions of Hare's account of him. Its lofty decorum and wise dignity seem dictated by the occasion, and show what he might have done had he conceived purely æsthetic ends thus deferentially. His "Address," too, on his election as Rector at Edinburgh is — especially for an essentially extempore address — marked by a rare sense of grace and harmony growing out of the sentiment of the occasion, which appealed to him, always on the moral side, of course, very personally; his apology for the furious fustian of the "Latter-Day Pamphlets" is particularly touching. But where he does not feel the pressure of moral constraint, his art is never dis-

ciplined out of its excesses nor inspired to its felicities by the effort for perfection. The disproportion between expression and reserve is, accordingly, extreme.

VII

In expression, however, perhaps prose has not had a greater master. He could say anything he wanted to and with extraordinary energy. His style is a perfect mirror of his mind. No writer's is so idiosyncratic — so intensely idiosyncratic. It illustrates not only all his traits but all his moods. It brings out into the starkest relief his defects as well as his qualities. It is terribly indiscreet and lays bare his caprice, his lack of deference, his defiance of discipline, his intoxicated irresponsibility. But it does more than this. It accentuates its substance, notably. It accelerates the momentum of his perversity and carries him along with it, through a *crescendo* of Berserker surrender to the wild delight of pure and utter expression, to a *finale* that is often outrageous and not infrequently inept. Never was there such an instance of the faculty of expression running away with its possessor. One perceives the explanation of his paradoxical praise of silence. After excess comes reaction. Self-consciousness is assailed by the sense of futility, and sincerity sacrifices its equilibrium in expiation. After a debauch of violence, which in the retrospect appears verbiage, La Trappe seems the only refuge. Then, of course — *da capo;*

endless renewal. Mr. Morley, I think, pleasantly characterizes Carlyle's works as "the gospel of silence in thirty volumes." But it is not this illogicality that is so conspicuous; the gospel of silence, like any other gospel, must be uttered, even reiterated. The paradox really consists in its being preached with so much verbosity, such stentorian tone, such *lucus a non lucendo* cogency — at times such splutter. Self-consciousness, dissatisfied with its own facility, on the one hand, dissatisfied, on the other, with the inherent disproportion between excess and cogency of expression, shows its exasperation in a disgust too drastic to be reasonable. "Be not a stump orator, thou brave young British man," admonishes Carlyle, "at least if thou canst help it." He knew how hard it was to help it. The addendum is illuminating. Perhaps it is humorous. But such humor is a trifle flat.

Carlyle's humor *is* in general, I think, a trifle flat. It is an eminent trait of his style, but perhaps the least preservative one. It is almost altogether composed of that element of his style which is its most crying defect — excess, namely; excess and caprice. Style implies consciousness, in large measure, and to ascribe humor to one's style instead of to one's instinctive manner of expression — as one must in the case of Carlyle — is to characterize it as artificial. His humor *is* artificial; it is more than wilful. And artificial humor depends upon novelty for its acceptability. Novelty, it is true, is an important consideration in many circum-

stances. The joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, closely examined, is doubtless partly due to it. But in the case of artificial humor novelty is a necessity. Such a specimen as the address to the Jesuit in "Latter-Day Pamphlets": "Prim friend with the black serge gown, with the rosary, scapulary, and I know not what other spiritual block-and-tackle," etc., may, for example, have pleased on its appearance. But the novelty has worn off, and this kind of thing, in which Carlyle abounds, is itself "left naked to laughter," and laughter of a rather dreary sort, as he might say. The image with which the "Cromwell" closes may once have seemed a grim audacity, a kind of Rabelaisian figure of heroic outrageousness, but what strikes one now in reading or recalling it is that it does not ring true. The same may be said of the welter of epithet and oddity with which his style is so often garnished. His allusions, comparisons, characterizations are frequently chosen out of a sense of humor, no doubt, but clung to, reiterated and played with out of deliberate perversity. They serve no end of illumination often, and only illustrate his disposition to free his mind without conveying anything to the reader, who indeed needs a glossary for their comprehension. But they are voluntary accidents of his style, and become mannerisms for which he displayed an increasing fondness. His underlying spontaneity, of which he had a stock proportioned to his enormous energy, often showed, accordingly, a surface of pure affectation.

His humor, thus, serves to betray the lack of genuineness in his style, and to bring out more clearly its lack of artistic sincerity. It bears all the marks of conscious elaboration. Original it undoubtedly is. It has no prototype even. But its originality is invented rather than native. Froude says quite truly that he had to make his own audience out of a public at first perplexed and repelled by it. It was deliberately assumed, as its post-dating the correctness of his earlier manner, the manner of the "Life of Schiller," shows. And not improbably it was assumed for effect, as the phrase is, designed, that is to say, to arrest attention rather than to win adhesion for the substance it clothed. He was for years casting about to "do something" that should show his powers and give him his predestined place. The "something" proved to be his style. "Sartor" less fantastically habited would have appeared less singular; it would have appeared, as it does now to readers long accustomed to its eccentricities, not so very extraordinary after all. Its style was its Byronic collar, so to say. Oddity was in the air in those days. The outward and visible signs of transcendentalism were quite as striking as its inward sanction. Carlyle eluded its superficialities and concentrated his fantasticality upon something more vital. He had awaked many mornings without finding himself famous. The long delay made it increasingly desirable that he should "burst upon the world" in some way. He did so in his style, which served the

purpose—his more or less conscious purpose—perfectly.

Artistically sincere it cannot, at any rate, be called, whatever its origin. It is too patently perverse. But it is extremely personal, and, as Carlyle developed it, it came to be an admirable instrument of pure expression, its excesses and eccentricities matching the perversities of his mind and giving him a freedom which, however disadvantageous in other respects, enabled him to say effectively whatever he wished to say. They grew together, perhaps with mutual concessions, until he reached the ability to pour it forth extempore with an ease of efHuence rivalling the song of a bird, the natural gush of a fountain, and yet always with such idiosyncrasy as sometimes to borrow from it character for very commonplace substance. No writer has ever achieved such distinction in singularizing ineptitude by the piquancy of his style. It came to vary directly with the varying temper that vibrated around the course of his most constant thinking. It is the vivid and elastic medium of his gravity, his irony, his deep earnestness, his triviality, his vehemence, his sportiveness, because it follows closely his every impulse and never checks nor constricts his utterance by the suggestion of conformity to any consistency of its own.

It certainly had consistency. So marked a style must indeed run into mannerism and monotony. But its consistency is the mere reflection of Carlyle's emotional state. When he glows it is vivid, when he nods

it is dull with an ashen dulness. The moment his energy flags it becomes mechanical; its elasticity "sets"; its artificial side becomes evident. But certainly at its best, that is to say at his best, it is superb in the transparency with which it discloses the energetic working of a powerful mind under the stress of strong emotion. It interposes no veil between the writer and his readers. It is wonderfully direct and wonderfully plastic. It is vital rather than crystalline because its inspiration is feeling. But it is notably clear. Incrusted with the various extraneities of obscure and recondite allusion dictated by personal caprice and a contemptuous indifference to the comprehension of the reader, the thread of it is always brilliantly plain—like a streak of scarlet through a tangle of green. It is never turgid even in its violences, nor involved even in its fantasticalities. Its vocabulary is enormous, but never encumbers it. It eschews pedantry with instinctive felicity. Its epithets are complete characterizations. Its very unevenness heightens its color. No conceivable style could better fit the picturesque, and in the external world it is the picturesque that absorbs Carlyle, as the moral does in the spiritual. The world, considered purely as a spectacle, impressed him as a chaos of confused contrasts and, aside from its moral meaning or futility, it stimulated his acute sense for the fortuitous, which is the essence of the picturesque. Its ordered beauty did not greatly move him. His feeling for the truly dra-

matic is accordingly a little superficial, I think, though when he feels it on its moral side, he treats it with a splendid eloquence, as in the conclusion of the lecture on Mahomet with its "within one century afterwards, Arabia is at Grenada on this hand, at Delhi on that; glancing in valor and splendor and the light of genius. Arabia shines through long ages over a great section of the world." One could cite such instances by the score, instances of eloquence untouched by rhetoric, untainted by the common, thought and expression fused at white heat and glowing with a purity of radiance that is the very mystery of genius and its power to transfigure the temperamental plebeian and the hereditary peasant into the poet, the prophet, and the patrician.

VIII

"THE moral life of man," says Froude, in one of those sentences that tend to make literature of his writings, "is like the flight of a bird in the air. He is sustained only by effort, and when he ceases to exert himself he falls." Carlyle's supreme service to his generation is to have stimulated and strengthened its sustaining moral energy. Except his notable rehabilitation of the Puritans and Cromwell—a *very* notable exception, it is true, yet after all not only strictly cognate to his work as a moralist, but strictly also in a sense an academic excursus of it—little else, I think, can be claimed for him. Of the histories, his "French

Revolution" is a caricature and a libel, and all the pictorial splendor of its poetic prose cannot obscure its fundamental misconceptions. His "Frederick" is a piece of Titanic special pleading. Freeman remarked of "The Decline and Fall," that whatever else was read, "Gibbon must be read, too." Conversely, one may say of the "Frederick," that whether it is read or not, something else must also be read, and Mr. Tuttle need not have apologized for his painstaking "History of Prussia."

On his own theory that, "to know a thing, what we can call knowing, a man must first *love* the thing, sympathize with it," Carlyle should have let the eighteenth century — "*ce siècle sans âme*" — alone. Man, not God, was its preoccupation, in contradistinction from its predecessor. Its "soullessness" revolted him. Its humanitarianism meant nothing to him. Its great discovery of the dignity of man, he flouted. In its substitution of the heart for the soul, its rationalization of the affections, its ideals of freedom of spirit and faculty, of equality of rights and duties, of fraternity of interests and feelings to the end of mutual advantage and co-operative advance, he saw only a chaotic scramble after the *ignis fatuus* of happiness, selfishly inspired. In the seventeenth century he is at home, and accordingly his "Cromwell" is his greatest work, his true masterpiece. But even the "Cromwell" is as history impaired by the heavy defects of its qualities. As its eulogist, Taine, himself, observes:

"Carlyle is so much their [the Puritans'] brother that he excuses or admires their excesses—the execution of the King, the mutilation of Parliament, their intolerance, inquisition, the despotism of Cromwell, the theocracy of Knox." Different temperaments will always view them differently, but historically the last word has probably been said about the Puritans. And though he prepared the way for it, it is certain that Carlyle did not say it.

There remain in the way of formal service to his time his slight and suggestive rather than systematic advocacy of emigration and education as remedies for English ills and his introduction to the English reading public of German literature—of which his treatment, however, was notably uncritical. It is outside therefore of his partisan history, his not novel philosophy, his imperfect criticism, formally considered, that the true distinction of Carlyle's writings is to be found. It is to be found in their moral cogency—the moral cogency with which, indeed, his history, philosophy, and criticism are impregnated, and which, rather than their historical, philosophic, or critical merits, constitutes their vital value. A critic of the absence of the practical in his gospel calls him merely "a moral brass band," and contrasts him painfully with philosophers of the concrete usefulness of Bentham and Mill. The figure is hardly just. Morally considered, he had not the rudimentary organization it implies; he was rather a double orchestra. But the meaning is sound. Why,

however, moral stimulus should be belittled; why, above all, it should be deemed, of all things in the world, *unpractical*, is difficult to see. "They were not madmen, but men of business," says Taine, of the Puritans. "The whole difference between them and the men we know is that they had a conscience." It is not the whole difference, but it is in the highest degree a practical one. The view that conceives *character* rather than institutions as the great force in human affairs, individual as well as social, is as practical as the converse view; it is indeed the view which has mainly determined the crises of English progress, the view from which its vaunted "practical results" have proceeded. To celebrate this view, to enforce it on every occasion, to converge upon its significance the sum of human experiences and the reflections they arouse, to illustrate it with a wealth of example, to extract its essential dignity and nobility from the crudities with which it is often encumbered, to exhibit it as the one necessary and permanently fruitful consideration for bringing human activity into accord with the harmony that is not human but divine, to exalt it with eloquence and preach it with the ardor of fire, all with a view to the induction in the reader of a distinct spiritual attitude governing his every thought and act, must seem to any one but a pedant, in strictest computation, the most practical thing in the world. To assert the contrary is equivalent to calling the Levitical code, for example, more practical than the Sermon

on the Mount. Discussion of the practicality of Carlyle's preaching is, in fact, pure verbiage. What is really meant by the denial of it is that in a time of measures he occupied himself with men.

His real limitation—and it is, I think, a tragic one—is not the miscalled unpractical nature of his writings, the nature they share with those of perhaps the majority of the writers who have influenced the thought and feeling of the world, but the defective nature of his spiritual ideal. His conception of character is of rectitude plus energy, and it is an imperfect conception. Character is, it is true, the basis of everything persistent and effective in the effort of mankind and what saves it from futility and chaos. But character that is most efficient and most benign is character rounded and complete, its energy tempered with sweetness, its derivative conduct illumined with light, and its various powers expanded in every fruitful direction instead of driven in upon themselves in concentration and constraint. "Were we of *open sense* as the Greeks were," he says finely of the sailing of the Mayflower, "we had found a Poem here." Precisely. Of all our writers he most lacks this "open sense," and his lack of it narrows his spiritual horizon. Beauty lies beyond its bounds—even the beauty of holiness. In his hierarchy of heroes there are no saints. He is temperamentally of the old dispensation. The expansion of the new, under its vitalizing principle of the love which casteth out fear, is quite foreign to him.

His references to the Crucified are perfunctory and mechanical—one would say obligatory rather than spontaneous. He never melts in joyous unison with the fair smile upon the face of Duty, or inhales with the dilutest rapture the fragrance that treads in her footing. His almost unremittent tension does not relax into kindness. His exacting demands are not tempered with tolerance. "On the whole we are not altogether here to tolerate! We are here to resist, to control and vanquish withal," he says. One perceives the spirit that animates him. Beside such evidence of it, his occasional eulogy of the "Religion of Sorrow," even, seems a concession to the conventional.

Of the four powers into which Matthew Arnold conveniently divided humanizing agencies: the power of intellect and science, the power of beauty, the power of social life and manners and the power of conduct," the last only interests him or plays any part in his gospel, which is therefore wholly addressed to the individual. The only *concert* I can recall of which he speaks well is Knox's theocracy, which also appeals to him as the ideal of a millennium in which all the individual units are righteously disposed. What we know as social forces were to him quite negligible. He admired amenity as little as he possessed it. He praises the "broad simplicity, rusticity" of the "Norse System" as "so very different from the light gracefulness of the old Greek paganism," and argues its sincerity from its rudeness. "Sincerity, I think, is better than grace,"

he naïvely adds. And indeed naïve is the one word to apply to some aspects of Carlyle's point of view. He knew the world profoundly, but he viewed it from Ecclefechan. Moreover, he saw his own principles through the prism of his temperament. And no writer ever had so much temperament. It injures his ideal for us and makes it less attractive. But what is far more grave is that, in doing so, it weakens the stimulus he would otherwise afford to readers who would otherwise be drawn to those of its elements that are at once noble and indispensable. He imposes it instead of making it lovely. To earnest souls—and he can have no other readers—the way seems hard enough. Carlyle often recalls the anecdote related by Mr. Frederic Harrison apropos of Fitzjames Stephen, perhaps Carlyle's most distinguished disciple, in which a stern confessor tells a dying penitent, endeavoring to turn his thoughts toward heaven, that he "ought to be thankful he had a hell to go to." "To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise" is not only more winning and therefore of a higher potency, but it illustrates a later stage of ethical evolution.

Nevertheless Froude's striking figure, which I have already cited, is justified of every man's experience. Every man, the most innocent as well as the most virtuous, knows the incessant pressure of the necessity of moral effort. "There is none that doeth good, no, not one." The opportunity of doing good or of avoiding doing it is exquisitely adjusted in scale to the degrees

with which perfection is approached. Every one is conscious of life as a succession of choices which it behooves him to make rightly on pain either of, at the least, a sense of dissatisfaction or of feeling that he is ceasing to count at all and declining into the estate of "the beasts that perish." Of himself he can do nothing. Effort and high resolve — whether labelled "the grace of God" or "the higher self" is immaterial — are needed to dominate the "law of the members," which operates instinctively along the line of least resistance and tends toward the greater inclination, and the result of which, in the modern world at least, is dissatisfaction and distress. In the antique world we are apt to think it may not have been so. Heine, for example, conceived that it was not so, and the tragic result of this belief in his own case does not refute the many true and searching things he said in support of it. "The ideal, cheerful, sensuous, pagan life is not sick or sorry," says Matthew Arnold, writing of Theocritus. Of the real pagan life, however, one may find the witness of the ideal idyllist less illuminating than the graver literature from Æschylus to Juvenal. And whatever it was, it is over. Evolution alone has fixed our status The purely sensuous ideal, if it ever practically existed, is irrevocably submerged. The tyranny of conscience has perhaps also passed its apogee. When Mr. James, for example, concludes his life of Hawthorne with the words "Man's conscience was his theme, but he saw it in the light of a creative fancy which added out of its

own substance an interest and I may almost say an importance," the modern reader is quite in agreement with him. But conscience long since won its permanent place in the domain of the common consciousness of mankind. It has not been exorcised in its rationalization. And the status it imposes is recognized by consciousness as the prize of constant effort. What greater service than the stimulation of this effort is it open to literature to render to humanity? one feels like asking in the presence of Carlyle's massive contribution to what he himself loftily defines as "the Thought of Thinking Souls." Only one, perhaps; that of lightening it as well.

GEORGE ELIOT

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I

How long is it since George Eliot's name has been the subject of even a literary allusion? What has become of a vogue that only yesterday, it seems, was so great? Of course, every day has its own fiction—even ours, such as it is. But this does not exclude popular interest in august survival—Thackeray, Dickens, Jane Austen, Reade, Trollope, Charlotte Brontë, every one but Bulwer and George Eliot, I should say. As to Bulwer, perhaps, speculation would be surplusage. The neglect, however, into which so little negligible a writer as George Eliot has indubitably fallen is one of the most curious of current literary phenomena, and an interesting one to consider, since considering it involves also a consideration at the same time of the remarkable genius that is the subject of it. It is probably largely due to the fact that from a purely intellectual point of view people, in books or out of them, are both less interesting and less idiosyncratic than we were wont to suppose when George Eliot's fame was at its height.

The novelty of psychological fiction was a powerful

source of attraction, in the first place. For any such fiction as hers, which keeps one actively thinking not only some but all of the time, the stimulus of novelty is requisite, because only under such stimulus does the mind experience the zest that alone sustains the needed alertness of appreciation. In the second place, its *ex vi termini* superiority—surely no stuff of fiction could have the dignity and the significance of the human mind!—gave it an irrefutable claim on our esteem. The novelty has disappeared. We have had a surfeit of psychological fiction since George Eliot's day. Psychology, too, has entered as an element into almost every other variety of fiction. And the glamour of novelty gone, we have been able to discern the defects, once obscured by the qualities, of the purely intellectual element of fiction when it wholly overshadows all others. We now recognize that science had invaded the domain of literature—*dona ferens* and undistrusted. The current reaction, started perhaps, exemplified certainly, by Stevenson—the significance of whose work is purely "literary"—is so great as to have sacrificed seriousness along with science. But it is not necessary to exalt the puerile in order to establish the insufficiency of the pedantic. And to pedantry, however obscurely felt or unconsciously manifested, disproportionate preoccupation with the intellectual element in fiction is apt, popularly, to be ascribed.

II

George Eliot certainly stands at the head of psychological novelists, and though within far narrower limits she has here and there been equalled — by Mr. Hardy, for example; and in highly differentiated types, in the subtleties and *nuances* of the *genre* by Mr. Henry James—it is probable that the *genre* itself will decay before any of its practitioners will, either in depth or range, surpass its master spirit. As George Eliot herself remarks, "Of all forms of mistake, prophecy is the most gratuitous"; but we may conjecture that the psychological novel, in its present explicit sense, will disappear before her own pre-eminence in the writing of it is successfully challenged. She is, thus, and is likely to remain, a unique figure. More than any other writer's her characters have—and for the serious readers of the future will continue to have—the specifically intellectual interest. This interest, indeed, is so marked in them that one is tempted to call it the only one they possess. What goes on in their minds is almost the sole concern of their creator. Our attention is so concentrated on what they think that we hardly know how they feel, or whether—in many cases, at least, where we nevertheless have a complete inventory of their mental furniture—they feel at all. They are themselves also prodigiously interested in their mental processes. They do a tremendous lot of thinking. In any emer-

gency or crisis their minds fairly buzz, like a wound clock with the pendulum removed. We assist at the spectacle of a cogitation that seems to be pursued by the thinkers themselves with disinterested devotion. At all events, the stars of the company not only practise but enjoy mental exercise to an extent not elsewhere to be met with.

I have heard it remarked in qualification of the legitimate interest of Thackeray's characters, that they "never seem to have any fun with their minds," and it is certainly true that in the concert of powers of which the nature of Thackeray's personages is composed, the mind does not hold a notable hegemony. The personages themselves are rarely either introspective or mentally energetic for pure love of the exercise. But the drama itself of George Eliot's world is largely an intellectual affair The soul, the temperament, the heart —in the scriptural sense—the whole nature, plays a subordinate part. The plot turns on what the characters think. The characters are individualized by their mental complexions; their evolution is a mental one; they change, develop, deteriorate, in consequence of seeing things differently. Their troubles are largely mental perplexities; in her agony of soul Romola goes to Savonarola and Gwendolen to Deronda for light, not heat. The prescriptions they receive are also terribly explicit — addressed quite exclusively to the reason, and wholly unlike that obtained by Nicodemus "by night." The courtship of Esther and Felix Holt is mainly an

interchange of "views." There are exceptions — notably Maggie Tulliver and Dorothea, the two characters which have been called — with ample reason, one may guess — autobiographic. But the exceptions accentuate the rule. As a rule the atmosphere of each novel is saturated with thought. Certainly nowhere else in fiction is there any such apotheosis of intellect, both express and implied.

Yet it is the temperament, not the thinking, of men and women that is permanently and rewardingly interesting in that field of literature which fiction constitutes. Sociology rather than psychology is its auxiliary science — because, no doubt, sociology is hardly to be called a science at all. Thought is a universal and automatic process compared with feeling, than which it is far less idiosyncratic and particular. It is comparatively impersonal. It does not distinguish individuals with any very salient sharpness. Other things being equal — which, perhaps, they rarely are, but that is nothing — people think very much alike. It has been remarked of the insufficiency of argument that a legislative vote was never changed by a speech. The mind is far less recondite than is generally imagined, except in so far as it is complicated by feeling. Turgenieff legitimately complains of Zola that he tells us how Gervaise Coupeau feels, but never what she thinks. But the converse exclusiveness is a greater defect. Surely the characters of Turgenieff himself that remain in our memory are those whose feelings

he has described rather than those whose minds he has exhibited to us. Who knows what Gemma, or the Russian Dido in "Spring Floods," thinks? Or, rather, we know what they *must* think without being told — their thinking being clearly a mere corollary of their feeling, which is admirably set forth. Why is Maggie Tulliver such a definite entity to us, beside Felix Holt, for example? Because she feels more and is shown to us from this point of view. Felix, even, would have had very much the same and no more interest for us if his creator had furnished him with an entirely different stock of the notions in which he is so rich. Why is Tom Tulliver not so interesting a character, but, being profoundly uninteresting rather from any but a curious standpoint, so characteristic a masterpiece of George Eliot's genius? Because he is differentiated mentally, almost exclusively, with the result of nearly complete colorlessness—so wholly is color in character a matter of temperament—and because George Eliot's intellectual preoccupation is here, therefore, an advantage and not a limitation in the work of characterization. She has not made Tom interesting, but she has made his lack of interest real, and so vividly real as to be profoundly suggestive, and therefore the point of departure for interesting speculation in the reflective mind.

Where the lack of temperament is not, however, the point of the character to be illustrated, her practice is less productive. Her major premise, that all people are mentally interesting, is seen to be at fault

when she deals with personages the discrimination of whose intellectual peculiarities certainly needs to be supplemented by a consideration of that side of them which says, "I myself am heaven and hell." The soul is always interesting—in its traits, its potentialities, its mystery — whatever its incarnation. It is permitted us to believe—but even if theretofore the statement had been a supercilious supposition, George Eliot would have demonstrated its soundness—that there are numbers of our fellow-creatures whose minds hardly repay study. How many pages of "Middlemarch"—that encyclopædic panorama of the provincial human mind—are there devoted to the meeting of hospital trustees to elect a chaplain? Who remembers the outcome, even if, indeed, he remembers that the contest was between a Church clergyman and a dissenting minister? But who, that remembers the incident at all, does not recall how completely the mental equipment and processes of each of the mainly insignificant members of the board are exposed and documented? And with what result? Chiefly, I think, that of leading one to inquire, "Why?"

III

One consequence of this intellectual preoccupation and point of view is incontestable: whatever one's predilections, one cannot gainsay that it is fatal to action. In George Eliot's world nothing ever happens, one is

tempted to say; certainly less, very much less, than in the world of any other writer of fiction of the first rank. Sometimes nature intervenes, as in the flood of "The Mill on the Floss." Sometimes there is a catastrophe of a human but impersonal order, as in "Romola." Nothing dramatic is evolved out of the action that is a resultant of the forces of character, for of these forces the intellectual only and not the passional have been elaborately dealt with. The infanticide in "Adam Bede" is a barely concrete excuse for the structure of moral analysis erected upon it. The intensest incident inspired by love — before George Eliot certainly a not neglected element of fiction — is the kissing of Maggie's arm by Stephen Guest; though the tragedy of this book is too splendid to suffer from any limitation. Mr. Frederic Myers notes that the only love-letter in all the novels was written by Mr. Casaubon. There are whole chapters of mental analysis leading up to Dorothea's marriage, but the marriage itself takes place off the stage and is chronicled in a line. Nothing is more characteristic than the way in which the catastrophe of "Daniel Deronda" is treated. George Eliot leaves the telling of it entirely to Gwendolen. Any one interested in the fate of Grandcourt (perhaps he is not quite "convincing" enough to be popular) would resent the abruptness of his drowning, his sudden disappearance from the face of the earth, his demise only to be described later as material for casuistry.

It is undoubtedly partly true that George Eliot

shrank instinctively from the melodramatic. "At this stage of the world if a man wants to be taken seriously he must keep clear of melodrama," she makes Deronda observe. She certainly wanted to be taken seriously, and she certainly has been; even solemnly. But her instinctive feeling in this respect was greatly reinforced by her practice of limiting the field of her fiction as she did. The drama with which she was concerned was the interior drama, the successive mental changes whereby a person gradually attains his or her development; and to this anything like elaborateness or complication of plot, any narrative of events or record of incidents which play so important a part in fiction, even when they are merely the background that sets off the characters concerned in them, seems inapposite. Her themes are in general so high and her treatment so serious, the moral so inevitable, so like the moral of life itself—the life and reality of which any book of hers is the equivalent in literature—that even tragedy, where she employs it, seems a little artificial, a little contrived and arranged, a concession perhaps to precedent, an expedient at best, less *typical* at all events than the moral it enforces and decidedly inferior to it in reality, in convincing illusion. Indeed, where her practice did not exclude it altogether, her tragedy itself comes very near the confines of melodrama, from which her instinctive repugnance does not save her, and which she would probably have handled better but for her predetermined consecration to the undramatic and phil-

osophical. One need mention in illustration only "The Spanish Gypsy," in which melodrama abounds — though melodrama, it is true, of the mildest-mannered kind that ever flourished on the banks of the Guadalquivir or arrayed itself in Andalusian vesture. But there is a tincture of melodrama even in such a tragedy as the end of "Romola." Imagine even Zola, who is none too scrupulous in such a situation but who "understands himself" admirably in it, resorting to the "poetic justice" of Baldasarre's final reunion with Tito in the death-grapple in the Arno. The whole Baldasarre part of the book, indeed, is melodrama, and the least successful of the motives of the story. The Hawthornesque incident of the secret panel in "Daniel Deronda," which when moved disclosed the dead face adumbrating the tragedy of Grandcourt's death, is melodrama, albeit of an awkwardness that shows a flagging fancy and a tired hand. In short it cannot be said that George Eliot's true theme—the constitution and development of the human mind and its effect on the conduct and character of the soul, its subject—either receives, or especially needs perhaps, the aid of action, of the dramatic element, upon which nevertheless a very considerable part of the general interest in fiction depends.

IV

An analogous but more important trait is the lack of creative imagination that is implied, as the lack of

action is involved, in the scientific turn of her genius. Whatever dramatic demands upon a novelist's characters one may forego, the vivid and enduring interest of the characters themselves requires an imaginative differentiation. Otherwise they lose in concrete effect very much in proportion to their abstract interest, which in George Eliot's characters is very great. And it is the concrete effect that, in any work of art, is of fundamental value. George Eliot's world is certainly less concrete than its moral inspiration, which is often as definite as a proposition. Her characters are thus, it is true, perfectly typical — in spite of the extent to which they are psychologically individualized. And this constitutes for them a family distinction of importance. The characters of no other novelist are discriminated so nicely at the same time that they have also a clear representative value. They occupy a middle ground in this respect, one may say, between the personages of Thackeray, who is accused latterly of having no psychology, and those of Hawthorne, which, as Mr. James points out, are never types. This is, perhaps, why they are so rarely our companions, our intimates, as the characters of even inferior novelists are, though I imagine the reason is mainly that they are mentally instead of temperamentally individualized, and that it is the sense, the volitions and the emotions rather than the intellect of people which, in fiction as in life, attach them to us and give them other than a quasi-scientific interest for us. And, besides, George Eliot's star char-

acters, if types, are apt to be *rare* types, and, from that fact also, depend largely on their speculative interest. "Yet surely," as she says herself (in "Janet's Repentance"), "the only true knowledge of our fellow-man is that which enables us to feel with him, which gives us a fine ear for the heart-pulses that are beating under the mere clothes of circumstance and opinion." We do not, I think, sufficiently *feel* with George Eliot's personages. They have too much a speculative, and too little an imaginative, origin and suggestion.

It is for this reason, perhaps, more than any other, that one can hardly claim for her the quality of the "born novelist," in the integral, exclusive, and felicitous sense in which Thackeray was one. Nevertheless, it is as certainly true that in the creation of character her remarkable gifts were at their best. She thought about other things, to be sure, when this was the matter in hand, and did this less well in consequence. Moreover, she did other things, and did them from their own point of view. But she did these less well still than the worst of her character-construction. Whereas, for example, the fact that she wrote "The Spanish Gypsy" at all attests the incompleteness of her native call as a novelist, its marked inferiority to her novels, in spite of its sincerity, its ambitiousness and its notable excellences, gives a certain relief to the genuineness of her true vocation. It is not perhaps to say very much to say that her characters are her own, and in a more intimate sense than that of their family likeness to which

I have alluded. No one else could have created them. They have no fellows outside her world. Any one else would have portrayed the same types, even, very differently. But this is so *eminently* true—so much truer than it is of some novelists of very high rank, of the romancers in general, very often, surely—that in itself it witnesses the harmony with which her genius expressed itself in fiction, and shows why she wrote novels better than she wrote anything else. Add to this the particular quality of her genius and its eminence, and the high rank of her fiction is deduced as the third term of a syllogism. It is indeed a body of work that not only is of the first order but that stands quite by itself.

It was doubtless in thinking mainly of George Eliot, whose aptest pupil he was, that more than a score of years ago Mr. Hardy spoke of fiction as having "taken a turn, for better or worse, for analyzing rather than depicting character and emotion." It was certainly George Eliot who more than any other practitioner gave fiction this turn—a turn still followed, with whatever modifications, and illustrated in all serious examples of the art, so much so that a novel without the psychological element is almost as much of a solecism as a picture with a conventional *chiaroscuro*. Analyzing, synthetizing—the terms do not matter much; in any mental exercise of importance, both processes are involved. Nothing could be more systematically synthetic than the patient way in which, having arrived, deductively, no doubt, from the suggestions of

observation, at the idea of a character, and then analytically induced the traits which belong to it, George Eliot puts these together in orderly demonstration of the validity of her original theorem. This, to be sure, relates to the mental process of the artist rather than to the technic, which is certainly analytic enough in the case of George Eliot. But it is worth while, perhaps, in accepting Mr. Hardy's expression as practically adequate enough to indicate to us the turn in fiction that he had in mind, nevertheless to remember that with George Eliot, at least, analysis has no tyrannical preponderance over other faculties of the mind, and that, so far from being allowed in unchecked monopoly to unravel its material into uninteresting and unrelated shreds, it merely co-operates with these to a truly creative end. A character of George Eliot is never picked to pieces, in a word. It is perfectly coherent and original — as original and coherent as a character of Dickens, for example, which is not analyzed at all.

It is, however, not the product of the imagination. Its conception — let us say, rather, its invention — is less irresponsible and spontaneous than if it were ; itself, therefore, has, on the whole, less vitality — less reality, which is the vitality of a character of fiction. It is the result of the travail of the mind, the incarnation of an idea, not the image of a vision. Such a character as Gwendolen in "Daniel Deronda" is as truly a creative as if she were not also a critical product, but it is clear that, inductively conceived, she is deductively deline-

ated; one cannot avoid seeing the machinery, so to say, of the author's mind throughout the process, and applying to it the terms of logic rather than of literature. She is an essay, with illustrations, on the egoistic girl to whom her own personality is of immense, of absorbing importance, who counts wantonly on imposing it, and who "falls on dark mountains" and meets with infinite disaster, in thus following out the uncompromising law of her development, when she comes in contact and into conflict with the crushing forces of circumstance, and finds the world quite other than her pygmy and peremptory conception of it — finds it not only not ductile, but pitilessly despotic. Nothing could be finer than such an idea, nothing more interesting than the essay, with its incarnating illustration, in which it is expressed. The defect — at least the distinction — of the character is that the idea was born before, and conditions, its embodiment. With all her characterization, therefore — the invariable light green of her costume, for example, on which her creator leans with such evident helplessness — Gwendolen is imperfectly exteriorized. Always in exteriorization George Eliot's touch shows less zest than in examination. At times it is fatigued, often infelicitous, and now and then grotesque; Deronda's mother, with her orange dress and black lace and bare arms, is a caricature, a mere postulate of her profession of public singer. And not only is Gwendolen ineffectively presented: she is incompletely realized as an individual, in virtue of her creator's absorption in

ner typical significance. You are impressed by her interest in her own personality as a significant moral trait, but you are more interested in the trait than in the personality; the personality is more elusive, not quite varied enough; what else does she do, think, feel, say, besides explicitly exhibit egoism? one asks. Like every other character of her extraordinary creator, she is thoroughly *in* character. She is conceived and exhibited with an absolutely informing consistency, and with a strictness unusual even in psychological fiction. Mr. Hardy, for instance (such stress does he lay on the *ewig Weibliche*), makes two women, whom he takes pains to show as of the most disparate organizations, do the same thing — act in a way which if natural to one of them, would, for that very reason, be out of character in the other.

But consistency is not only not completeness, not fulness, not variety, not productive of special interest and pleasure: it is a decidedly inferior element in the production of illusion, the illusion that is a condition of vitality in a character of fiction. Beside unexpectedness it is, in this regard, of no merit whatever. The consistency of Bulstrode, Tito, Felix Holt, ends by boring us. You want a personage in a book as out of it to act in a way that you cannot everlastingly prefigure. To surprise but not shock expectant intelligence involves, however, the aid of the creative imagination. And we have only to turn from Gwendolen to Daniel Deronda himself to realize how much George Eliot's

other faculties exceeded her imagination. She is for once unhampered by any scientific subscription to the laws of reality. She has almost with *gaîte de cœur* abandoned, in this instance, her old reliance of observation aided by sympathetic divination. She has made Deronda out of whole cloth. She has done everything for him, and spared no pains to make him attractive and personal. He has a "grand face," though a young man; his smile is occasional and, therefore, "the reverse of the continual smile that discredits all expression." He is just what she wants to make him — her imaginative ideal. He is no more real than Charlotte Brontë's Rochester. We owe him entirely to his author's creative imagination. The result is aptly enough implied in a letter written — obviously in Scotch — by Stevenson to a reviewer friend, when the book came out. "Did you — I forget," he says, "did you have a kick at the stern works of that melancholy puppy and humbug, Daniel Deronda himself? the Prince of Prigs; the literary abomination of desolation in the way of manhood; a type which is enough to make a man forswear the love of women, if that is how it is to be gained." The whole structure and color of the book indeed (Gwendolen and her affairs apart) may be said to be George Eliot's one explicit imaginative flight and — shall we say therefore? — her one colossal failure.

The irresponsible imagination has certainly much to answer for as an element of fiction and a factor in its

composition. But at the present day it is plainly superfluous to dwell on the fact. The weight of current criticism is altogether against it, whatever the practice of the hour. And not only in fiction but in plastic art the errors for which it is no doubt justly held responsible have come to wear the aspect of solecisms. The application of a realistic standard is become almost instinctive. What is imaginative seems imaginary, and beauty that is not also obviously truth has lost its intimate appeal. There are signs of reaction, and no doubt the "image-making" faculty will again receive the recognition that for the moment more or less exclusively rewards the observation which normally — and notably in most very notable works of art — has the humbler rôle of verification and correction. And the reason is that creation is inconceivable without it. The criticism that constructs in fancy an inherent antagonism between it and truth is blind to the fact that it is through the imagination that the human mind arrives at truth as well as at error. Discovery is ideally deduced; it is the guerdon of hypothesis — without which, in the field of art, at all events, the mind rests in the suspense that has been noted as a mark of hysteria. In science, not less than in art, synthesis is an imaginative process. In a word, the truth-loving sceptic of the imagination is confuted by the inevitable procedure of the mind, and must admit the platitude that to see that a thing is so it is necessary first to see the thing. In all art worth talking about, therefore, the

imagination is inevitably present. It may count as a feeble or as a powerful force. It may shine by the beauty, by the truth of the images it constructs or evokes, or be obscured by the data accumulated for its justification by diligent induction. But empirical scrutiny and sharpness of perception will never take its place. And its absence means an artistic vacuum. With George Eliot it certainly counts for proportionally less than it does in any great writer of fiction. Of course there are compensations, as I have endeavored to indicate. One need not prefer "Monte Cristo" to "Middlemarch."

Apparently in this respect of the imagination, as in others, she did not herself sufficiently recognize the genuineness of her vocation as a novelist. At all events she did not depend on it. Yet there are characters and situations, there are in fact whole novels, among her works which show that it would have triumphantly withstood any strain she might have put on it. "The Mill on the Floss," the "Scenes of Clerical Life," show what her genius left to itself could, unaided, accomplish. But she was not content to leave it to itself. She had other ambitions—ambitions which she could attain, which a woman with less intellect (there have been none with more) could not, which would attract less a man of equal genius, which the very circumstance of her sex—given her environment on the one hand and her powers on the other—teased her toward with a fatal explicitness.

"See that you hold yourself fast by the intellect," said Emerson in a famous passage, the acme of his eloquence. "It is this domineering temper of the sensual world that creates the extreme need of the priests of science; and it is the office and right of the intellect to make and not take its estimate." Never was this ideal more enthusiastically followed than by George Eliot. She illustrates it even a little literally. The result is a certain dryness, a certain mechanical effect for which unimaginative is just the epithet. She brought her mind to bear on everything, and almost ceremoniously, so to say. This was clearly enough instinctive with her. There is nothing artificial in it. And this saves it from pedantry. She was intellectually very high-bred. There is not a hint, a shadow of vulgarity in any of her books. She is at home with the very best and has no inclination for anything else; she has no moments when her sense for the excellent relaxes and sags into irresponsibility. Without austerity — without much humor, too, surely, except in so far as the appreciation implies the possession of it — she is never tempted into caricature. She has no excess of high spirits thus to mislead her, but in any case her taste is a sure reliance. Her taste, indeed, is the part of her intellectual equipment that is perhaps most clearly instinctive. Æsthetically considered it is less trustworthy, but in the intellectual sphere — where taste has an important office — it shows itself a certain winnower of the worth while

from the common. If at need it tolerates the commonplace, it is because the particular commonplace has its significance; and if it is a little eager in its appreciation of the significant which is also the eccentric, it is because it is easily and aristocratically at home with eccentricity itself. It is absolutely — singularly — free from display. In that sense, at all events, she was not in the least a pedant. Her pedantry, to call it so, was pedantry in the sense of literalness—and seen as such mainly from an æsthetic view-point. Her erudite, even recondite, air, at times, is perfectly in accord with the most thorough-going simplicity. It is wholly natural. A sentence incrusted with erudition and intricate with logical involution is with her a native and unpretentious expression. Any pedantry, in other words, to be detected in her writings is apt to be a matter of form, an error from which the æsthetic sense alone (in which she was conspicuously deficient), and no amount of intellect, can protect one. Even if now and then the substance is as flat as the statement is solemn, it is never tinctured by that variety of mediocrity which is of the essence of pedantry and which we know as vulgarity—there is not in all her writings a touch or a trace of it, as I have said. "All her eagerness for acquirement," she says of Dorothea, "lay within that full current of sympathetic motive in which her ideas and impulses were habitually swept along. She did not want to deck herself with knowledge — to wear it loose from the nerves and blood that fed her

action." That is very nobly said, and it is doubtless autobiographic. But did ever such "eagerness for acquirement" as that of Dorothea's creator characterize any other novelist of her calibre? And erudition, however triumphantly assimilated, aside, the spontaneity that vivifies its creations is of a different order from a pure exercise of the intellect, however instinctive. And this spontaneity she may be said to have so instinctively alloyed with reflection, so transmuted by thought, that often she seems to lack it altogether.

V

Its absence is particularly apparent in her style. One may speak of George Eliot's style as of the snakes in Iceland. She has no style. Her substance will be preserved for "the next ages" by its own pungency or not at all. No one will ever read her for the sensuous pleasure of the process. She is a notable contradiction of the common acceptation of Buffon's "*le style c'est l'homme.*" Her very marked individuality expresses itself in a way which may be called a characteristic manner, but which lacks the "order and movement" that Buffon defined style to be when he was defining it instead of merely saying something about it. In itself, moreover, this is not often a felicitous manner. It is inspired by the wish to be pointed, to be complete, to give an impeccable equivalent in expression for the content of thought, to be adequately articulate. In

her aim at exactness she neglects even energy. Her statements are scientific, but never even rudimentarily rhetorical, if we except the use of irony, in which she was sometimes very happy. Of modulation she never seems to have thought. Any element of periodic quality, of rhythm, of recurrence, of alternation, succession, inversion, for the sake of effect, decorating instead of merely expressing significance, she would no doubt have eschewed had any ever occurred to her, as plainly it never did. Rhetoric of any degree, in short, probably seemed to her meretricious if — which one doubts — she ever considered it at all. She was the slave of the meaning, hypnotized apparently by the sense, and deaf to the sound, of what she wrote. Her taste was noticeably good in avoiding the pretentious, but her tact was insufficient to save her from the complicated and the awkward. Her puritan predilections should have suggested simplicity to her, but simplicity is the supreme quality which she not only wholly lacks, but never even strives for; the one salient characteristic of her style — of her manner of writing, that is to say — is its complexity.

Thus there are no "passages," either "fine" or in any way sustained, in her works; at least I think of none, and if any exist I suspect they are put into the mouth of some personage with whom they are "in character" — in which case they would be sure to be very well done indeed. Every sentence stands by itself; by its sententious self, therefore. The "wit

and wisdom" of the author are crystallized in phrases, not distilled in fluid diction. Their truth strikes us sharply, penetrates us swiftly; the mind tingles agreeably under the slight shock, instead of glowing in expansive accord and dilating with gradual conviction. Often these sentences have the force, the ring, of proverbs—of those of Solomon, too, rather than those of Sancho Panza. Some of them, on the other hand, have the air less of the Sibyl than of "saws," and suggest the wiseacre more than the philosophic moralist. At times they have the trenchant crispness of La Rochefoucauld; at others, even in the novels, the unravelled looseness premonitory of the appalling Theophrastus Such. The manner naturally takes on the character of the substance, and we have thus this formal sententiousness—now epigrammatic, as I say, and now otiose and obscure—because of the writer's exclusive consecration to the content, which itself varies, of course, from the pithy to the commonplace. Her defective æsthetic feeling, her lack indeed of the æsthetic sense, nowhere comes out more clearly than in this absorption in the significance, to the neglect of the aspect, of the picture she is presenting. This picture, and even the personages who people it, seem to have for her at least a disproportionate attraction in virtue of their typical, to the exclusion of their individual, interest—sharply individualized as her characters are in the matter of psychology alone. She seems so impressed with their universal appeal and representative office, with the

principle her facts illustrate and enforce, with the ulterior meaning and value of her "criticism of life," as to have at all events distinctly less zest in depicting than in defining her material. For fiction this indubitably means a tame style.

Lacking in æsthetic feeling as she was, she was probably more or less conscious of this. Her attempts to circumvent it are now and then deplorable. They are invariably verbiage of one kind or another. The refuge of pedantry in its endeavor to escape dulness is apt to be sportiveness, and it is perhaps when she is playful that George Eliot comes nearer pedantry than at any other time. Even in moments when her erudition seems elaborate and essentially inapposite, we are always conscious that it does not seem so to her, and that not only is there no parade about it, but also neither is it in the least mechanical. It is the native, however awkward, expression of a kind of tempered enthusiasm. At times, certainly, the sense of humor failed her equally with the æsthetic sense, of which in a large—or strict—sense it is, of course, a subdivision; and the artist who could objectively reproduce such humor as that of "Adam Bede" and "The Mill on the Floss" could also, when it came to self-expression, illustrate the very acme of dulness. Her facetiousness is, at its worst, as bad as Dickens's; and, at her worst, she writes as badly, without the mitigation of his extraordinary high spirits and infectious hilarity. Without, too, his bad taste, though with, as I said, the

tactlessness which is the next thing to it. The moral element in taste involves self-respect. And in anything moral George Eliot is never deficient. Her intelligence saves her; it is too serious, it has too much poise, and it sees temptation as a kind of sophistry—temptation, I mean, to put up with the second rate on account of its tinsel, for example. But the tact that shows one when he is hitting and when he is missing the mark, she does not infallibly possess, and often when, apparently, she seems to herself to be exhibiting the light touch, she is bravely ponderous. With a little more tact, a little more humor, a little more æsthetic sense, some of her significance might have been even more striking, and certainly some of it would not have seemed so absolutely flat.

But why discuss her style at all, one asks one's self. No one can have any doubt that, though, in general, it serves her well enough, and sometimes expresses adequately the most searching subtleties of observation and reflection, nevertheless its idiosyncrasies are defects. And of style in any large sense surely no great writer ever had so little. Her constant references in her letters to her "art" have an odd sound. Yet even here one's last word must be a recognition of the extraordinary way in which her intellect atones for sensuous deficiencies. Could two better words be found, for a slight example, to characterize the first impression Rome makes on the stranger than "stupendous fragmentariness"? One of her characters, "like

most tyrannous people, had that dastardly kind of self-restraint which enabled him to control his temper where it suited his convenience to do so." The adjective is felicity itself. And in her letters one can see how safely her intelligence guides her through the museum maze of plastic art for which she had so little native feeling, but in which less than many an æsthetic temperament is she either imposed upon or unappreciative. In art, as in life, she has an acute sense, if not a sensitive feeling, for what is distinctly worth while.

VI

No one, however, as I have intimated, would infer her personality from her style — certainly not that trait of her personality which, in spite of her apotheosis of the intellect, distinguishes her from the so-called intellectual woman, and which I take to be intimately characteristic. In books or in fact the first impression made by the so-called intellectual woman is that of the inadequacy of the intellect. There is so much else that is admirable, one reflects in the presence of such thorough-going exclusions. The attractiveness of the susceptibility and even the will is thrown into effective relief. Intuitions seem to gain a new sanction, instinctiveness a new charm, spontaneity a new grace, irresponsibility a new excuse — qualities intimately associated with women. The limitedness of the intellect, the distant view of sympathetic relations — fancy,

unexpectedness, clairvoyance, all lying without its confines — become depressingly plain. One naturally reacts under the exaggerated emphasis of importance and all-sufficiency that the intellect receives from the intellectual woman in general, whose consecration to it is so complete, so obvious, so naïvely unconscious of what exists beyond its pale. It is not so much that she is too intellectual. At times one finds that she might be even more so, even if less strictly so, with advantage. It is that she seems to be unaware that compared with character or even temperament the intellect itself is terribly concrete and communicable. And perhaps there is nothing that sets George Eliot off from those of her sex for whom the intellect is a universal talisman, so much as the circumstance that she does not make this impression. On the contrary, one's impression is of the plenary power and sufficiency of the intellect unaided and unillumined *ab extra*. So searching and fruitful are its processes as exhibited in her works; so pregnant are the discoveries of her scrutiny and reflection in the heretofore unexplored regions of human character and moral relations; so pithy are her deductions; so stimulant is her turning of her "allowance of knowledge into principles" (as she says of Dorothea), that one feels almost that other faculties are surplusage, and that the field of fiction as well as that of science belongs to the intellect, thus shown to be capable unaided of such distinguished results. Other relations, one feels, remain to be discovered,

other principles to be formulated, other mysteries of thought and passion and conduct, of the real world and the correlative ideal one, to be solved by this magic divining-rod, this mighty crystallizing force. Partly this impression is produced by George Eliot's superiority. Intellect *enough* is its own sanction and imposes itself. But partly also it is due to her personality, to a temperamental richness of *nature,* that for the moment imposes on us even her own *attitude,* which is, nevertheless, that of the fanatical worshipper at the intellect's shrine.

How early her complete consecration to the things of the mind took place would doubtless have been difficult for herself to tell. It must, however, have been in the nature of a conversion. She was doubtless always, as she describes Dorothea, "ardent, theoretic, and intellectually consequent," but the break which she made with her early traditions and beliefs must have been in the nature of a transformation from a nature emotional and expansive because fundamentals are settled, into one in which scepticism stimulates inquiry and which, therefore, in proportion to its seriousness, is driven to aggrandize the intellect, which is the instrument of inquiry. This change, whether or no induced by her acquaintance with the sociologists and positivists whom she met when she first began literary work, antedates her work in fiction, which fact and the fact that it *was* a change can hardly fail to account for much in this fiction. It is, in a word, the work of a

woman, of an extraordinarily intellectual woman, of a woman who had come to concentrate her interest and effort within purely intellectual lines *after* a spiritual experience in which the emotions probably played a predominant part. Its notable complexity is hardly surprising.

Her environment probably accounts for the evolution of her genius. Nothing could be less favorable to the harmonious development of the intellectual side of Mary Ann Evans, one would say, than the environment of Mrs. Lewes, even though she may have been converted from "orthodoxy" before going to London at all. Science, which spared Dorothea and never made the acquaintance of Maggie Tulliver, took possession of her. Metaphysic, philosophy, sociology, theology enthralled her "ardent, theoretic, and intellectually consequent" nature. Her emotional side, which one may judge not only from early accounts but from the very latest was wonderfully sensitive and refined, became forthwith subordinated instead of developed, so far as regards its expression in her very objective books. She became, even in the intellectual field, almost the ideal non-conformist. Other points of view, which she appreciated wonderfully, she appreciated through comprehension rather than sympathy. She was too objective for altruism of the mind, even. Her writings are almost invariably marked by elevation, but elevation to which there is no lift. Her spirit has no wings. Her letters show her stoicism to have been severely ethical

and without sentimental alloy. To do good to others, to look at the practical results of our actions and not bother about how we feel concerning them, is very much the sum of her credo. Of God, Immortality, Duty, the last only is left to us, Mr. Myers dolefully records her as asseverating. This may be true, of course, but, even so, to be preoccupied with its truth must inevitably be a handicap to a writer of imaginative fiction — God and immortality connote so much ideality.

Her thinking was eclectic and shows the lack of comradeship, of harmony and accord, of those fostering influences of concert under which thought flowers in luxuriant spontaneity. "Our duty is faithful tradition where we can attain it," she makes the solemn Deronda assert. But faithful tradition is just what she did not attain — just what practically, I think, she came to have very little feeling for. She wished instead to "prove all things," for which operation she had indeed an admirable equipment, but in which she showed too exclusive a zest. Tradition at all events never dupes her. Nothing amuses her more than — in the best taste always, assuredly — to expose the insubstantiality of its pretensions on just occasion. The net result of her mature theory and practice is a noble work performed for truth, somewhat to the neglect of the beautiful and the good, except in so far as these benefit indirectly from any service done to truth. And even so far as truth itself is concerned, though we get

unexpected, felicitous and cogent glimpses of it — and what is more, a sense that its deeps are both inexhaustible and infinitely alluring — nevertheless one feels that there is an order of truth itself for which the intellect alone has not quite the test, and which is of overmastering significance, though it can only be imaginatively perceived. "Il faut avoir la foi et ne pas croire," says Claude Bernard. All dogma quite aside, it is certain that George Eliot once possessed what we know (but do not understand) as "faith," and that when she wrote her novels she had substituted for, instead of adding to, it the sapient scepticism unveiling illusions that is such an integral element of her fiction. She is in consequence more nearly unique; she is more isolated; but she is also less authoritative and less complete. There is therefore an atmosphere of cause and effect, of fatalism, of insistent and predetermined gloom which pervades her books and which is hostile to the variety pertinent to a report of nature that is round and full. In this way her microcosm is a little more distorted than perhaps it need have been, but for her conversion — her whole-souled conversion — to positivism.

VII

Would she have done better to have followed what I take to have been her native bent? Who would wish any great writer different? Who would take the *risk?* Yet I must say I think there would be a minimum of

risk in the case of George Eliot. And for this reason. Her development seems to me to have proceeded on lines increasingly inharmonious with her native endowment. Her temperament was an ardent one, yet increasingly contained instead of exercised. Her whole nature was tremulously sensitive to impressions, and it constantly steeled itself to systematic reflection. Her faculty of observation was marvellous, and she became more and more of a recluse as time went on. She absorbed altogether the best part of her material — that of which her first books and "Middlemarch" are composed — before she began to write at all; afterward her material was necessarily so extraneously attained as to be by comparison factitious. She was, if not profoundly, at least acutely, religious, and she became a positivist. Intimately emotional, avidly exigent of sympathy, having that imperious need of giving one's self which assails truly independent but affectionate souls, her expression steadily grew in impassibility and in a stoic consideration of the impersonal as the highest good; and duty to others — to the community, the world, the race indeed — became a sort of refuge for her ideality. When one thinks of her early years and their associations, her precocity and emotional development, and then of the immense spiritual contrast involved in her work in London, her union with Lewes, her friendship with Mr. Spencer, her emancipation, if one likes, and the subsequent seclusion which certainly had its ideal, but also inevitably its artificial side —

when one follows the evolution of her genius from the earlier books through "Romola," "Middlemarch," and "Daniel Deronda" to "Theophrastus Such," getting gradually further away from her native substance and quality, and ending in comparative ineptitude, one comprehends her marriage and surcease from activity. She had re-entered regularity, had ceased to be exceptional and "attained tradition"—in the words I have already cited. It could not be that she should not rest in a kind of peace unattainable through conscious effort and intimately grateful after a life of intense mental activity further stimulated by an elevated and really ideal, but nevertheless peculiar position. Nothing is more touching than Mr. Cross's account—of a delicacy in itself equivalent to poetry—of her last years. She had done her work. And it had been done during a sort of prolonged excursion into the realm of science, where the native temperament and genius, that might otherwise have powerfully modified the product of an extraordinary intellect, had been deflected if not repressed.

For no judgment of George Eliot can be discerning which does not consider the vital fact that she was—even in a degree really typical—a woman. She belonged to the subjective sex, and is the most objective of novelists. It is the fashion at present to neglect the distinction of sex in speaking of women, and pay them the compliment, or do them the justice, of treating them severally as individuals, discriminated merely as

men are discriminated. Nevertheless until their distinction in certain fields of activity is as much a matter of course as that of men—until there are no more "Women's Buildings" at world's fairs, for example, and the propaganda in favor of the sex as an entity ceases to obscure the individual standard which naturally tends to get itself established if let alone—anything like the eminence of George Eliot's powers will be singularized because of the possessor's sex. It *is*—as yet—generally remarkable, worthy of remark, that a woman should have reached such a height of accomplishment. But that her accomplishment should have been in the field of thought rather than in that of feeling, and so splendidly successful in this field as almost to have originated a species in the domain of fiction, is specifically the notable phenomenon in George Eliot's case. Why is she so unlike George Sand and Charlotte Brontë?—one may exclude Jane Austen, in thinking of precedents, as exclusively an artist. Is it because of her different and in the main superior mental quality, and the greater subordination of feeling to thought in her original make-up? Probably not. Whatever George Eliot became there can be no doubt that Mary Ann Evans was a woman in whom the idiosyncrasies of sex were particularly developed. As to the existence of such idiosyncrasies and their native, elemental, and possibly ineradicable character George Eliot herself never had any doubts. The difference between the sexes is one of the phenomena that compose her ma-

terial. Her writings are full of man considered as man, and woman as woman. She has widened the sphere of woman's interest for us, but has not obscured its identity. The impartiality of her view, however, excludes the patronage which the as yet, perhaps, more susceptible sex is as yet quick to feel, and her caustic treatment of masculine foibles excuses her occasional dry compassion for what the author of "Janet's Repentance" calls "poor women's hearts!"

"Poor women's hearts"! What became of hers in the transition from Miss Evans to George Eliot through Mrs. Lewes? one cannot help speculating. Its interests certainly grew both more limited and less concrete—more limited in the sense involved in her isolation, her concentration of feeling within the smallest of circles and her absorption, in geometrically increasing ratio, in the things of the mind; less concrete as her ethics took on more and more a humanitarian color, and the good of society in general became the main concern of her speculative meditation. One has only to imagine Mr. Casaubon more human, less a pedant, more a real scholar and minus his littlenesses, to divine that Dorothea might have developed into a philosopher of moment, losing in the process the edge of those qualities that render her so sympathetic to Lydgate, to Ladislaw and to ourselves. Had she, under such circumstances, written novels, they might easily, like those of her creator, have been noteworthily objective, and have missed the personal charm of native feminine

genius which is now so conspicuously characteristic of her. Had George Eliot not fallen in love with science; had not her feeling for the world of her girlhood atrophied with the loss of faith in its standards, so that she got more and more domesticated in a foreign environment, and even predisposed to exotic themes, suggested by intellectual and acquired rather than native and sentimental interests—"Romola," "The Spanish Gypsy," and "Daniel Deronda," for instance; had she not given the rein to her curiosity and become absorbed in the world of books, of literature rather than its raw material, which she could nevertheless handle to such admirable ends; had she not, as it were, made herself over into an intelligent force from being a person with idiosyncrasies, and expressly subordinated the susceptibility in which, not only as a woman, but as an individual, she was so strong, to the more purely intellectual development which she could only share with so many masters, we should have had works of undoubtedly more charm, and, such was the native force of her genius, of equal power. We should have had, in fine, more books like "The Mill on the Floss"; "Middlemarch" would have been more condensed; "Felix Holt" would have been dramatic; we should have lost "Romola," perhaps, but we should have escaped "Daniel Deronda." It is not that, as is so often the case with writers who study significance rather than form, her early books are superior to the later because the sense of selection is more acute and ex-

clusions more rigorous at the beginning of a career than at its apogee, when everything that occurs to the author seems to him for that reason worth saying. They are superior because, unlike the later ones, they are cast within the lines of her native capacity, because they do not call for imaginative power, for artistic synthesis and dramatic vigor, but amply illustrate her sympathetic feeling, her closeness of observation, her faculty for loading with serious significance and almost ominous suggestion the most ordinary and unpretentious data of human life by drawing out their typical quality at the same time that they are psychologically differentiated in a way to make them extraordinarily individual and real. "Depend upon it, my dear lady," she says in her first story, "you would gain unspeakably if you would learn with me to see some of the poetry and the pathos, the tragedy and the comedy, lying in the experience of the human soul that looks out through dull gray eyes and that speaks in a voice of quite ordinary tones." *That* is George Eliot's truest note, and it is a note struck by no one else; we have nowadays plenty of fiction woven around dull gray eyes and voices of ordinary tones, but the experience of the human soul is not often what these express. It is a note also which is far less prominent in the writer's later novels, the novels that help us to understand what Mr. George Moore means by saying that she "tried to write like a man." One feels like replying to Mr. Moore, that at least she succeeded. But any one

who agrees with me in dividing her books into two groups, those written before "Romola" and those written afterward, will hardly find it fanciful to see in the former a native, and in the latter an acquired, point of view and manner of treatment. When one considers the potentialities of the author of "The Mill on the Floss"—a work in which passion and the tumult of the soul are not objectively analyzed but sympathetically portrayed with unsurpassed vividness and elemental power, a work which is indisputably one of the great literary epitomes of the pathos and tragedy of human existence — it is hard to reconcile one's self to the evolution in which temperament disappeared so completely in devotion to the intellect alone as to result in the jejune artificiality of "Daniel Deronda."

It would be idle, and certainly I have no disposition, to belittle the value of the literature produced between these two books. "Romola" is unique in its way, and has hosts of admirers. There are readers to whom it introduced the Italian Renaissance, who in its pages first read of Florence, Savonarola, the Medici. There are scholars who shared George Eliot's enthusiasm for "the City by the Arno" and "the wonderful fifteenth century" so cordially as to credit "Romola" with having successfully reproduced a moment and a milieu which they were only too grateful to have recalled. Besides, there is that masterpiece of evolution, the character of Tito Melema. "Felix Holt" contains at least the lovable Mr. Lyon, and though the weari-

some wordiness of the book is a handicap from which it will always suffer, it will always remain a highly interpretative picture of a momentous epoch in English political and social history—the birth, in fact, of the modern English world engendered by the Reform Bill. "Middlemarch" any one can praise. It is probably the "favorite novel" of most "intellectual" readers among us—at least those who are old enough to remember its serial appearance. It is, indeed, a half-dozen novels in one. Its scale is cyclopædic, as I said, and it is the microcosm of a community rather than a story concerned with a unified plot and set of characters. And it is perhaps the writer's fullest expression of her philosophy of life.

VIII

It is these books and "Daniel Deronda," rather than the earlier "Scenes of Clerical Life," "Adam Bede," "Silas Marner," and "The Mill on the Floss," however, which determine her position as so much less an artist than a moralist. She is in truth a moralist, and a moralist of the first class. I do not of course mean the sense in which Fénelon, for example, or Paley is a moralist. Expressly and in form a novelist of her rank is an artist, in whose work the moral significance is either spontaneously generated or incidentally induced. But essentially and spiritually speaking, George Eliot, whatever her superficial classification, is so far less an artist than a moralist that it is as the latter that she

is of value to us and is most likely to appeal to the future. It is as a moralist that she is a real contributor to literature, that she is at her best, that she is of the first class, and that, among novelists at least, she is, if not unrivalled, at all events unsurpassed. No such explicit "criticism of life" as hers exists in fiction. Thackeray, for example, is a moralist, too. He was very fond of his office of "week-day preacher." But he is a moralist not only because his picture of life is so true and vital, but in virtue of moralizing, of commenting on his story and his characters, drawing out their natural suggestions, weaving around them a web of artistic embroidery, eliciting and enforcing the lesson they contain. With George Eliot the story and characters themselves are conceived as examples and illustrations of the moral she has in mind to begin with, and a part of its systematic setting forth. The moral is her first concern. Her characters are concrete—remarkably concrete — expressions of pure abstractions, not images. Arthur Pendennis is the result of an attempt to depict the average man of his day and station. Tito Melema incarnates the idea that shrinking from the unpleasant is subtly and tragically demoralizing. There can be no doubt as to which is the creation of the more specific and unalloyed moralist. George Eliot's "moralizing" is always a sort of logical coda or corollary of the moral idea or truth which her character or incident happens to be illustrating, and is never the artistic moral suggestion of the subject.

This is probably why it is tolerably dull, so often. It is apt but inferred, sound but not spontaneous. At any rate, it is not in her *obiter* that her success as a moralist lies: it is in the very essence, subject and attributes of her work.

This world was not to her the pure spectacle it is to the pure artist, nor even the profoundly moving and significant spectacle it is to the reflective and philosophic artist. Its phenomena were not *disjecta membra* to be impressionistically reproduced or combined in agreeable and interesting syntheses. They were data of an inexorable moral concatenation of which it interested her to divine the secret. What chiefly she sought in them was the law of cause and effect, the law of moral fatality informing and connecting them. Since the time of the Greek drama this law has never been brought out more eloquently, more cogently, more inexorably or — may one not say, thinking of Shakespeare? — more baldly. But at the same time she makes human responsibility perfectly plain. No attentive reader can hope for an acquittal at her hands in virtue of being the plaything of destiny. She is more than mindful, also, of the futilities as well as the tragedies of existence, and, indeed, gives them a tragic aspect. "Middlemarch," for example, read in the light — the sombre light — of its preface, is a striking showing of her penetration into the recesses of the commonplace, and of the else undiscovered deeps which there reward her subtlety; with the result, too, of causing

the reader to reflect on infinity, as he does after a look through the telescope or microscope—an effect only to be produced by a master. But in neither the tragic nor the trifling does she engage the freedom of the individual, and if she shows the victim in the toils of fate, she shows also with relentless clearness how optionally he got there. Her central thought is the tremendous obligation of duty. Duty is in a very special way to her "the law of human life." The impossibility of avoiding it, the idleness of juggling with it, the levity of expecting with impunity to neglect it, are so many facets of her persistent preoccupation. The fatality here involved she states and enforces on every occasion. "Tito was experiencing," she flashes at us, "that inexorable law of human souls that we prepare ourselves for sudden deeds by the reiterated choice of good or evil that determines character." Transome's illusion, she says, lay in his "trusting in his own skill to shape the success of his own morrows, ignorant of what many yesterdays had determined for him beforehand." The "note" appears again and again. It is a diapason whose slow and truly solemn vibrations, communicated to their own meditations, all of her thoughtful readers must recall.

Her books are apt to close in gloom, but they leave you with courage. They contain the tonic of stoicism; and no one can be ungrateful to stoicism who has experienced the *soundness* of its solace in dark hours. At the same time, whatever one's personal predilections

in such a matter, one must admit that stoicism itself has experienced the vicissitude of evolution, and the modern stoic has, ancestrally at least, passed through the phase of Christianity. It would be the part of wisdom not to forget the fact, one would say—just as it is to yield the geocentric conception of the solar system, without too much recalcitrant argumentation. "The sentences of Epictetus are fortifying to the character; the sentences of Marcus Aurelius find their way to the soul," says Arnold. George Eliot is a modern Epictetus — Epictetus plus, of course, the modern *Weltschmerz*. One would compare her with Marcus Aurelius only in thinking of Arnold's further words about him: "The effusion of Christianity, its relieving tears, its happy self-sacrifice, were the very element, one feels, for which his soul longed; they were near him, they brushed him, he touched them, he passed them by." She, too, passed them by. Was it because her girlhood was so precocious that she could not see the forest for the trees of ignoble controversy which in post Reform Bill times had such luxuriant growth, and for which she had such sharp eyes—times she herself deplores as "days when opinion has got far ahead of feeling," when Dissent had a "theoretic basis," and polemical discussion abounded? Was it because she was converted by Comte and satisfied with Mr. Spencer's famous "system"—having largeness enough, by the way, to harmonize the two? At all events, it is certain that her mature philosophy does not take ac-

count of the miracle of grace. As a moralist this is her great defect, or rather deficiency. That subtle dynamic impulse of the will which the psychologists leave the theologians to describe as "the new birth," and which, as a matter of fact, fills a tremendous rôle in the drama of cause and effect, she makes little of. It lay natively within the folds of her sympathetic mind in earlier years, as "Janet's Repentance," for example, sufficiently witnesses, and it is certainly one of the most familiar of phenomena. We may know nothing of it, empirically, ourselves, but it is certainly as common as any other moral agency, if not indeed more common than all others. Moreover, not only are its energy and its effects to be observed in others, and in all ranks of the intellectual scale, from Philip's eunuch to Saul of Tarsus, from a crowd of Moody and Sankey penitents to the last French realistic *raffiné*, but every modern consciousness which looks deeply into itself discerns therein the potentiality of it — a potentiality definite enough to be at least a demonstration of its existence elsewhere. The miracle of grace, in a word, is a common enough and prominent enough factor in the universal moral problem to reward if not exact the attention of the artist who is also a moralist, and in excluding it the modern stoic exhibits a real limitation.

Its exclusion from the consideration of so eminent a moralist as George Eliot is undoubtedly due to the lack of imagination and the predominance of intellect

already noted in her genius and her practice. It is itself closely allied with mysticism, no doubt; it belongs, perhaps, in the domain of mysticism. And to deal with the mystic, or even to entertain an inclination to deal with it, necessitates the possession of the imaginative faculty and its cordial, unembarrassed, spontaneous activity, undeterred by fear of error and unrestrained by backward or side glances at the quite otherwise seductive data of ascertained truth. There is no shade of mysticism in George Eliot's moral philosophy, whose tenets and whose logic proceed from the processes of the mind and have little relation with "the vision" without which, says the wise man, "the people perish." Everything is taken on the side of it that appeals to the intelligence. Gwendolen comes to grief because she does not realize that domination is impracticable — because, in a word, of intellectual blindness. Grandcourt's baseness is an intellectual perversion, not a sensuous one. The story of Tito's mere repugnance to what is unpleasant becoming at last readiness for any crime is the story of a moral decline exhibited in a succession of mental phases. Even error is a kind of alienation and sin essentially a mistake. The notion of "dying to" it nowhere appears — I do not mean *pro forma*, in which shape perhaps it belongs less to literature than to dogma, but by implication. We are still in the penumbra, one would say, of the Old Testament. The *natural* results of error, the natural and integral sanctions of morality are con-

vincingly, refreshingly, and stimulatingly considered to the exclusion of the preternatural; but the natural content of *religion* is quite neglected. Here, as elsewhere, she takes the scientific, the intellectual view of the phenomena which compose her material, and with her the mind in this field excludes the soul as in the field of art it does the imagination.

But with whatever limitations, her position as a classic is doubtless assured. There are types of human character of which she has fixed the image in striking individual incarnation for all time; and her philosophy is of an ethical cogency and stimulant veracity that make her fiction one of the notablest contributions ever made to the criticism of life. It is none the less true, to be sure, that her survival will mean the surmounting of such obstacles to enduring fame as a limited imaginative faculty, a defective sense of art, and an inordinate aggrandizement of the purely intellectual element in human character, which implies an imperfect sense of the completeness of human nature and the comprehensiveness of human life. But no other novelist gives one such a poignant, sometimes such an insupportable, sense that life is immensely serious, and no other, in consequence, is surer of being read, and read indefinitely, by serious readers.

MATTHEW ARNOLD

MATTHEW ARNOLD

I

How different in a critical aspect from its condition when Arnold began to write is the England of our day — England and its literary dependency, ourselves! And how largely the difference is due to the influence of Arnold's writings! Thirty years ago he was deemed a dandy and a dilettante in literature. To-day his paradoxes are become accepted commonplaces. No writer, probably, ever passed so quickly from unpopularity through fame to comparative neglect; and this not because he illustrated the passing phase of popular thought and feeling, to which on the contrary he was generally in antagonism, but because his victory over philistinism was so prompt and his "bruisèd arms" were so soon "hung up for monuments." Was there ever a time, one asks one's self, when Anglo-Saxon critical taste was truculent; when measure and restraint were viewed with contempt, and mere erudition with reverence; when rhetoric as such was admired; when rodomontade and fustian were tolerated *nominis umbra;* when "curiosity" was discountenanced and disinterestedness despised; when poise, good temper, politeness

were negligible; when "allowing one's consciousness to play freely" was a meaningless rather than a trite phrase; when, in a word, Arnold's various deductions from his cardinal tenet of the value of culture seemed insubstantial and trivial? Yet to nine out of every ten of its comparatively few readers, when "Essays in Criticism" was first published, such a phrase as "How trenchant that is, but how perfectly unscrupulous," in characterization of Mr. Kinglake's rhetoric, was probably a complete revelation. There is, then, we said to ourselves, such a thing as rectitude outside the sphere of morals, and for us the point of view itself of criticism suddenly shifted.

Who now, except in wilful indulgence, enjoys what used to be admired as "prose poetry"? Yet at the time I speak of who was there that was not slightly puzzled by such a statement as: "All the critic could possibly suggest in the way of objection would be perhaps that Mr. Ruskin is there trying to make prose do more than it can perfectly do; that what he is there attempting he will never, except in poetry, be able to accomplish to his entire satisfaction"? Of course, our practice has not made the same progress as our principles. Practice is largely a matter of temperament, and the Anglo-Saxon temperament a pretty constant quantity. But whatever our practice, our standard would nowadays conform to Arnold's declaration that "the true mode of intellectual action" is "persuasion, the instilment of conviction." And if one seeks a concrete instance

of the great advance made in English critical writing in the past twenty-five years, mainly through the agency of that culture for which Arnold was always contending and in whose triumphs he is surely entitled to share, a very striking one is furnished by the contrast between the state of things at present and that existing when he inquired, "Why is all the *journeyman-work* of literature, as I may call it, so much worse done here than it is in France?"

His work, in short, is there to speak for itself. The poor have the gospel of culture preached to them, and his phrases are now at the end of every current pen. His ambition is no doubt disclosed in the happy lot he predicts for Joubert—"to pass with scant notice through one's own generation, but to be singled out and preserved by the very iconoclasts of the next, then in their turn by those of the next, and so, like the lamp of life itself, to be handed on from one generation to another in safety." But his fate has been to receive abundant notice from his own generation. Doubtless in spite of having been perhaps prematurely disseminated he will be preserved and handed on to Bacon's "next ages." There is certainly enough pollen in his essays to flower successively in many seasons and as long as the considerations to which he consecrated his powers interest readers who care also for clear and charming and truly classic prose. But what I wish to point out is that he has already received a large share of his reward, and that this is itself proof of the quality

of his merit, which is moral as well as critical and poetic; that this, in a word, designates his niche in the temple of the classics. To have one's gospel so promptly accepted demonstrates that it has been preached. He had, in a word, a mission. And he has fulfilled it. Falkland's ideal, he said, "conquers slowly, but it conquers." His own has, at least as an ideal, conquered already.

II

WHAT especially singularizes Arnold, personally, among the writers of his time and for his public is that, in a more marked and definite way than is to be said of any of them, he developed his nature as well as directed his work in accordance with the definite ideal of reason. He had probably little disposition originally to swerve from the pursuit of this ideal, but he made of it an aim so constant and so conscious as to illustrate it with great distinctness in his life as well as in his writings. The pursuit of perfection that he preached he practised with equal inveteracy. But in this pursuit he sought first of all completeness of harmonious development, and to the Greek he added the Christian inspiration. His own translation of the quality celebrated by St. Paul, "sweet reasonableness," was the chief trait of his character—the "note," to use the expression he borrowed from Newman and popularized, of his personality. His reasonableness was tinctured with feeling, his stoicism was human, his

temper affectionate, his aim benevolent, and his manner gentle. But he rarely lost the poise that he advocated so sedulously, and his gentleness for being ingrained failed no whit in vivacity or in force. The "Saturday Review" furnished him some amusement once by accusing him of being a transcendentalist, but there was nothing of transcendentalism in him. He was particularly hard-headed, indeed, and the invincible optimism and generous illusions of Emerson, for instance, seemed to him irretrievably insubstantial. Professor Dowden, whose apology for Shelley he reviewed rather drastically, collects from his "Letters" an interesting series of judgments of his eminent contemporaries, as follows:

Tennyson is "not a great and powerful spirit in any line"; with all his "temperament and artistic skill" he is "deficient in intellectual power." Mrs. Browning is "hopelessly confirmed in her aberration from health, nature, beauty, and truth." Thackeray is "not, to my thinking, a great writer." The mind of Charlotte Brontë "contains nothing but hunger, rebellion, and rage." Froude has "very sinister ways of looking at history." Freeman is "an ardent, learned, and honest man, but he is a ferocious pedant." Stubbs "is not ferocious, but not without his dash of pedantry." Mr. Hutton, of the "Spectator," has "the fault of seeing so very far into a millstone." Bishop Wilberforce has a "truly emotional spirit," but "no real power of mind." Carlyle "I never much liked. He seemed to me to be 'carrying coals to Newcastle,' as our proverb

says; preaching earnestness to a nation which had plenty of it by nature." Henry Taylor is "not very interesting; he talks too slow, and is a little pompous." Victor Hugo is not to be taken "so prodigiously *au sérieux*" as Renan seems to take him. Swinburne is "a sort of pseudo-Shelley," with a "fatal habit of using a hundred words where one would suffice." Seeley is lacking in lucidity. Disraeli's speeches are "heavy pompous pounding," and Gladstone's are "emotional verbiage." Lord Salisbury is a "dangerous man, chiefly from want of any fine sense and experience of literature and its beneficent functions."

These judgments publicly expressed might savor of censoriousness, but they were of course expressed in intimate correspondence and therefore show, to any but the censorious, how scrupulous Arnold was in his discrimination, how little he suffered himself to be imposed upon by the seductiveness of contemporary admirations, so powerful to any but an instinctively critical mind.

The "Letters" were disappointing to readers who perhaps unwarrantably looked in them for the literature which he limited to his writings, though the fact that he did so attests the precision, almost inconsistent with spontaneity, with which he ordered his activities. The "Letters" have been subjected to an unknown quantity of editing, but it is evident that they were adjusted to the measure of his correspondents' capacities and not expressive of his own. This, nevertheless, is a circumstance that has its advantage and shows a

very charming side of him. The "Letters" leave the impression of a singularly elevated soul, living habitually on a high plane. Spite of their lack of accent and incident they repay more than one reading, for this reason; and they bring out into a stronger light the qualities deducible from his works. They testify happily to shortcomings rather than defects.

He lacked the edge at least of the æsthetic faculty. In Italy he was preoccupied with botany rather than with the fine arts, and though it is perhaps too much to ask of any Englishman that in any environment he should forget his botany, still the slight impression the artistic wealth of Italy seems to have made upon him, judging from the "Letters," is significant of a sensuous side well under control. In the matter of art he speculated only; and in a general way, after the fashion of the "Laocoön." Nor is his sense of humor conspicuously spontaneous. It has the aptness of wit even where it is not, as is generally the case with him, distinctly wit rather than humor at all. His wit, however, is distinguished. It seasoned even—or I may say, especially—his controversy to an extent that makes literature of it. Voltaire's is more fundamental, more important, more vital, but it is not more exquisite. Renan's is less pointed. I recall no instance in which it misses fire. One can read the passages it illuminates again and again, and always with a renewed feeling of that intimate pleasure born of the appreciation of wit alone. A considerable number of dignities bear its scars,

but there is hardly a case in which these have not been bestowed in the interests of truth. The rejoinder to Mr. Newman's reply to the "Lectures on Translating Homer," for example, is a unique piece of sustained irony absolutely impeccable in its restraint within the limits of self-proving statement. A dozen other instances, of a pungency thoroughly personal, will occur to any reader familiar with his works.

His wit, however, thoroughly personal in its pungency as it is, is an instrument rather than a medium with him, as I have intimated. Outside of it he certainly lacked that indefinable but very definite element of character that we know as temperament. Lacking energy, he lacked also the genius of which he himself affirmed energy to be the main constituent. He freely acknowledged this, and made the best of it. He made, in fact, a great deal of it. Without in the least overrating himself he took himself with absolute seriousness, and his work from first to last is informed with the high sincerity of a consistent purpose — the purpose of being nobly useful to his time and country by preaching to them precisely the gospel he conceived they most vitally needed. For the consideration of his public and his era he deemed energy less important than light, earnestness less needful than sweetness, genius less beneficent than reasonableness, erudition less called for than culture.

To the advocacy of these ends he brought an essentially critical spirit. He was in endowment and in

equipment the first of English critics. Among English critics, indeed, he stands quite alone. No other has his candor, his measure of disinterestedness, his faculty of extracting their application from the precedents indicated by culture. But he is also eminently an English critic. Disinterestedness pure and simple, disinterestedness to the point of detachment he neither illustrated nor believed in — much as he advocated the free play of consciousness in dealing with subjects of vital concern. He gave the widest extension to the term moral — as, for example, when he comments on Voltaire's praise of English poetry for its greatness in moral ideas — but there is unmistakably the moral element of purpose in both his criticism and his poetry, which ranks him, I repeat, as a critic and poet who is not merely nor even mainly an artist but is an apostle as well.

III

It is natural, therefore, that his criticism, even his purely literary criticism, should be altogether synthetic. It is even didactic. He had, it is true, a remarkable gift for analysis — witness his Emerson, his clairvoyant separation of the strains of Celtic, Greek, Teutonic, inspiration in English poetry, his study of Homeric translation, his essays on Keats and Gray. But in spite of his own advocacy of criticism as the art of "seeing the object as in itself it really is," and his assertion that "the main thing is to get one's self out

of the way and let humanity judge," he was himself never content with this. He is always concerned with the significance of the object once clearly perceived and determined. And though he never confuses the judgment of humanity (to use his rather magniloquent expression) by argumentation and special pleading, his treatment of his theme is to the last degree idiosyncratic. He unfolds it and lets it speak for itself, but he is prodigiously interested in the process, and we, in turn, are interested in the happy fashion in which he conducts it. Sometimes, indeed, in this way, the process eclipses the product, and you remember such felicities as his "epoch of expansion" and "epoch of concentration," without quite remembering to which he assigns Burke or Shakespeare; or you recall his "method" and "secret" of Jesus without quite bearing in mind which is which. His machinery, in a word, sometimes rivets attention. And this is even more strongly attested by the fact that it is occasionally so obvious as to arouse irritation in readers insensitive to its nice adjustments and rhythmic repetitions, in which case the product also is doubtless missed altogether.

Moreover, no pure analyst (such as Sainte-Beuve), occupied with the endeavor to see the object as in itself it really is, would evince so much interest in its connotation. Arnold is interested in removing—often in satirizing—the current misconceptions of it. He does not write of Milton and Goethe, but of "A French

Critic on Milton," "A French Critic on Goethe," to show how differently these popular idols are estimated by a disinterested critic from the way in which they are estimated popularly. In his panegyric on Falkland, he is thinking also of Mr. Freeman. He notes the literary influences of academies because they are just such as he conceives useful to check and discipline the "freaks" and "violences" of Mr. Palgrave, and to temper the provinciality of Mr. Kinglake. Never has the missionary spirit of which I have spoken been exhibited with more charm and more distinction—less associated with its customary concomitants. But never, also, has it been more mistakably illustrated. "Real criticism," he says, "obeys an instinct prompting it to try to know the best that is known and thought in the world, irrespective of practice, politics, and everything of the kind." This is the burden of the stimulating essay on "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time." But instead of the disinterestedness which he advocates in such interested fashion, Arnold was always mightily concerned about practice and politics and everything of the kind. Given his genealogy and environment, he could hardly be other than he was. He was bound to interest himself in the Burials Bill, the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill, the law of bequest and entail, the Crimean War, the Irish Home Rule question, ritualism, the popularization of the Bible, the question of better secondary education, the question of the classics *versus* the sciences, and so

on. "The Englishman has been called a political animal," he says, and he was, as I have said, very much of an Englishman. And quite as much as his social, political, and religious writings, his literary criticism is explained by the circumstance that he was the son of Dr. Arnold of Rugby, and his environment the England of our day.

He had, however, unmistakably his own way of being an Englishman, and if his concern was moral and his aim didactic, as they certainly were, the disinterestedness he inculcates appears in his method. One may say, in fact, that his motive is didactic and his method disinterested. His criticism thus becomes truly constructive. In form he does not dogmatize, he deduces; he does not argue, he elucidates; he uses his subject to illustrate his idea. His idea, indeed, is his formal subject, however near his heart its application may be. He deals with ideas directly, and his genius for generalization appears even where he is most pointedly and pithily specific. The essay on "Equality" is an excellent instance. He is concerned about the specific advantage of restricting the English freedom of bequest and the consequent distribution of wealth. But he advocates the reform by presenting the *idea* of equality in the most attractive, disinterested, and detached way, as if it were merely a literary thesis. The disinterested free play of consciousness that he celebrates in criticism is usually displayed in analysis—notably in French criticism, of which he is

thinking, where in any given case the synthesis is apt to be assumed. (For, I suppose it will be admitted that in criticism the French are further along than ourselves, that is to say, can safely take more for granted.) But with Arnold the disinterestedness appears in the detailed construction of a thesis, whose central idea on the other hand is apt to be an abstraction held interestedly, to which abstraction the concrete parts have the relation of purely contributory exposition.

It is obvious, therefore, that his criticism differs in kind from that of other writers. It differs especially from that most in vogue at the present time. It is eminently the antithesis of impressionist criticism. It has behind it what may fairly pass for a body of doctrine, though a body of doctrine as far as possible removed from system and pedantry. It is wholly unfettered by academic conventions, such as, citing Addison, he calls "the sort of thing that held our fathers spellbound in admiration." But it is still more removed from the irresponsible exercise of the nervous system however attuned to taste and sensitized by culture. Certain definite *ideas*, held with elastic firmness but not developed into any set of procrustean principles, formed his credo, and his criticism consisted in the application of these as a test and measure of quality and worth. Their simplicity and their searchingness made their application fundamental, whether or no in every case it was either sound in emphasis or sufficient.

There is a great deal more to be said of Homer than that he is simple, rapid in thought, rapid in movement and noble, but these things are at least essential. Emerson is to many readers something more than "a friend and aider of the human spirit," but not something other. Shelley's poetry is undervalued in exclusive censure of its insubstantiality, but insubstantial and, in a vital sense, vapid much of it unquestionably is. Joubert will probably not outlive Macaulay, but what he stands for undoubtedly will. Victor Hugo is vastly more than a great romance writer, but a poet "of the race and lineage of Shakespeare" he is not.

Arnold passed his intellectual life indeed, whatever his didactic strain, in the world of ideas. No English writer, certainly, is richer in them. He touched nothing that did not set his critical imagination at work. He saw things in their bearings, and saw in them something ultimate as well as something actual. His imagination being critical and not fanciful, there was of course an order of ideas that did not attract it. He not only neglected the notional and the trivial, but the merely curious, whether scientific or æsthetic; ideas insusceptible of application to life did not claim his attention. Possibly this may be felt as a limitation if one compares him with Sainte-Beuve, who nevertheless, in some instances, paid for his universality the penalty of fatuity, just as even Goethe's pursuit of completeness legitimately earned for him Paul de Saint Victor's epithet "the Jupiter Pluvius of *ennui*." But as compared with

any English writer, certainly with any modern English writer, Arnold's plenitude of ideas can only be obscured by the circumstance that he so ordered and marshalled his array of them that the subordinate ones escape readers who note only the general lines along which these are grouped and to the relief of which they beautifully contribute. There is no *obiter* to arrest the running reader, but the very texture of the treatment of all his very definite and salient theses is woven of ancillary ideas of enough stimulus to furnish the entire equipment of an inferior writer. In a general way — for example, in his advocacy of culture — he illustrates as well as enforces his theme. And not incidentally — which would of course make a greater show — but organically. One may cite a dozen examples — such as, in small, "A Speech at Eton," where the single word *επιεικεία* is made the nucleus of a really wonderful web of suggestiveness; such as, and *par excellence*, the "Study of Celtic Literature" and the "Lectures on Translating Homer."

His criticism is distinguished also from much that is currently popular in being wholly non-scientific. To begin with, it is interested very largely in the one element that eludes the scientific spirit — the element of personality. It does not ignore the substantial contributions that the scientific spirit has made to the theory and the practice of criticism. It merely concerns itself, and in a personal way mainly, with material that is too highly organized to be satisfactorily consid-

ered when considered materially, according to Taine's famous method. It is not occupied with origins — a subject that has an almost universal interest at the present day — nor much with relations, the study of which for being more literary is hardly less scientific. To Arnold apparently the study of heredity and environment involved in literary criticism based on "the man, the moment and the *milieu*" theory, has very much the interest that the process of running up all our manifold appetites and emotions into the two primitive instincts of self-preservation and reproduction would have, and no more. It is sound enough, no doubt, but in large measure superfluous — at any rate elementary. What is really interesting is the efflorescence not the germ, nor even the evolution of the germ — I mean from a literary or any but a strictly scientific point of view. Similarly the study of relations, upon which the incontestably useful classification of developed literary phenomena is based, interests him only cursorily. It is distinctions, rather, that his criticism considers. In the difficult effort to "see the object as in itself it really is" his method is that of definition through distinguishing the object as it really is from the various appearances that dissemble it, and from those of its own phases, ancestral or circumstantial, that may account for but do not exhibit it.

Taine, who in proclaiming his method disclaimed having a system, but who certainly applied his method most systematically, wrote history, to be sure, rather

than criticism, and called history "applied psychology." His psychology, too, is of an extremely physiological cast. And neither history nor physiological psychology ever engaged Arnold's attention in dealing with literature. But Taine's point of view prevails widely with more or less modification in pure literary criticism. A critic quite otherwise psychological, the late Edmond Scherer, for example, adopts it substantially in maintaining that "out of the writer's character and the study of his age there spontaneously issues the right understanding of his work." This is the contention of followers of the "historical method," who are far from being as systematic as Taine or as temperamentally inclined to consider literary phenomena as impersonal, irresponsible, and ultimately mechanical. Of this assertion, that a right understanding of an author's work will thus spontaneously issue, Arnold himself says: "In a mind qualified in a certain way it will—not in all minds. And it will be that mind's 'personal sensations'"—"personal sensations" being precisely what M. Scherer wishes to circumvent in the historical method of criticism. To him, for example, the laudation of Milton by Macaulay is an expression of "personal sensations"; as to which Arnold aptly remarks: "It cannot be said that Macaulay had not studied the character of Milton and the history of the times in which he lived. But a right understanding of Milton did not 'spontaneously issue' therefrom in the mind of Macaulay, because Macaulay's mind was that of a

rhetorician, not of a disinterested critic." Arnold's own theme is the personal element in the works of others, and its treatment is frankly the application to these of this element in himself. The report it gives is the result, though this personal report is, as I began by noting, very different from an impressionist report in being carefully controlled and corrected by culture, framed, in fact, in accordance with the express principle of classic comparisons that he eloquently advocates and specifically illustrates in his essay on "The Study of Poetry," and as far removed from irresponsibility as if it claimed scientific exactness.

His subject, indeed, although as I have intimated almost always an idea or a number of associated ideas, is often ideas illustrated or exemplified in some personality. It is what Joubert, Keats, the Guérins, Heine, Byron were themselves and what, in relation to ideas, they stand for, in each instance. It is not at all how they came to be what they were, their evolution, the influences of their environment of time and place, or their influence in turn upon their age and succeeding ones. In brief, though their general interest is always drawn out, in contradistinction to the specific interest of pure portraiture, they are not generalized. They are neither depicted as, for example, Sterne is depicted by Thackeray, nor accounted for as Shakespeare is accounted for by Taine. Their qualities not their tendencies, on the one hand, and on the other their essential and intrinsic not their accidental quali-

ties, and of these only the typical and significant ones, are dealt with. They are considered in the light of their relation to literature, but nevertheless distinctly as personalities whose relation to literature, too, is a personal relation. Arnold's criticism may be loosely characterized as literature teaching by examples, just as history has been called philosophy so teaching. Only, his examples are not the various literary works, isolated, taken seriatim, or grouped, but the significant and illustrative writers in whose personalities themselves appear most definitely and concretely visible—thus fused, unified and at the same time most elaborately as well as most subtly presented—those literary phenomena that have the most critical value. To Carlyle history is the annotated record of great men. To Arnold criticism is the pertinent characterization of great writers, in the mind and art of whom their works are co-ordinated with an explicitness and effectiveness not to be attained by any detailed and objective analysis of the works themselves.

Nothing is commoner than to hear literature classified as creative and critical, with the inference of mutual exclusiveness between the two branches and the marked inferiority of criticism to what is called creation. Arnold performed a signal service in characterizing literature as "a criticism of life" and thereby revealing even to the unreflecting the essentially critical nature and function of the truly creative "thought of thinking souls"—to recall Carlyle's definition of

literature itself. His emphasis was of course on the word "life," but the incidental implication as to *how* literature is concerned with its proper "content" has a value of its own. To deal with life powerfully and profoundly is to deal with it critically. And in this fundamental sense the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and the "Ode to Duty" are themselves criticism. No one would pretend that specifically they belong to the literature of criticism, however, though they illustrate the importance of the critical element in literature in showing that their true superiority to many other creative works of their kind is their soundness and elevation as criticism—as criticism of life. Specifically the literature of criticism is concerned with literature rather than directly with life. But in this way and in a sense it has the office and character of a court of appeal, and its functions may be as honorable—as its roll is as distinguished—as those of any other department of literary activity. So far as *a priori* speculation is concerned, it is entitled to immunity from jejune formularies about the superiority of creation to criticism, as such, and of books to books about books.

What criticism lacks, and what will always be a limitation to its interest and its power, is the element of beauty which it of necessity largely foregoes in its concentration upon truth. It is less potent and persuasive than poetry, than romance, not because in dealing with literature rather than directly with life it occupies a lower or less vital field but because its province

lies outside the realm of all those puissant aids to cogency and impressiveness that appeal to the sense of beauty and accordingly influence so powerfully not only the intellect but the emotions as well. But of its service to truth there can be no question. Its rôle is not confined to exposition, to interpretation. It is a synthesis of its naturally more or less heterogeneous subject. It is a characterization of art as art is a characterization of nature. And in characterizing, it translates as art itself translates. It is only in criticism that the thought of an era becomes articulate, crystallized, coherently communicated. And real criticism, criticism worthy its office—criticism such as Arnold's —contributes as well as co-ordinates and exhibits. It is itself literature, because it is itself origination as well as comment, and is the direct expression of ideas rather than an expression of ideas at one remove—either chronicling their effect on the critic after the manner of the impressionist or weighing them according to some detached and objective judicial standard.

IV

Public questions interested Arnold acutely and his discussion of them was always suggestive if not conclusive. He dealt most successfully perhaps with those that were mainly social in their nature. The essay on "Equality," for example, is one of his best. That on "Democracy" is hardly its equal. Both are, however,

eminently stimulating because they deal with general principles and are, as the former asserts, "for the thoughts of those who think," at the same time that the commendation of equality as an ideal is convincingly buttressed by the salutary way in which laws of bequest are shown to operate in correction of the natural tendency to inequality; and that such penetrating remarks as "We have never yet been a self-governing *democracy*, nor anything like it," illustrate and enforce his discussion of the more political theme. In his dealing with questions of general public interest, indeed, it can be said of him as he said of Burke's treatment of politics, that he "saturated them with thought." But in more purely practical politics he was naturally less at home. Irish Home Rule obsessed him in his later years, but to an American sense at least, he was not happy in his treatment of it even from the political philosopher's point of view; and from the politician's what he said never, probably, seemed very cogent, as he was of course very well aware. He used to express surprise at American sympathy with Irish separatism, and compare Irish coercion with our Southern coercion as though the "unionism" of the two were identical. Like most Englishmen he made in this the two mistakes of presupposing our interest in the welfare of England *quand même* and as against Ireland in case of the two clashing, and of fancying the disruption of a homogeneous people parallel to the separation of two peoples intensely inter-hostile. All that he wrote about the

Home Rule question is no doubt already forgotten, though much of it was pungent and all of it patriotic.

On the other hand his "Friendship's Garland" is a little classic. The section entitled "My Countrymen," in especial, is a perfect piece of writing, full of the most delicate irony, by turns playful and mordant, and enough in itself to establish his eminence both as a wit and as a satirist. British political philistinism was never so deftly flayed. The essay on "British Liberalism and Irish Catholicism," a plea for a Catholic university in Ireland, is a forcible and luminous discussion of much larger import than the title in itself would imply. But Arnold never touched the great subject of education without illumining it, and he has treated many phases of it, not all of which by any means relate particularly to the problems of his own country. The principles upon which he based his argumentation are of universal pertinence; and his conception of education as eminently a public concern and one of the most vital of public interests, his view of the importance to civilization of what is called secondary education and his exhibition of the relation of schools to culture count as so many contributions to literature itself.

Culture, of course, is his central theme. His name is popularly and rightly more closely associated with it than with anything else. It is his notable reliance and recommendation in every department of thought and action with which he occupies himself — religious, poetic, critical, political, social — his gospel, in a word.

Culture he defines as "a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all matters which most concern us, the best which has been known and thought in the world; and through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits which we now follow stanchly but mechanically, vainly imagining that there is a virtue in following them stanchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically." He exhibits and illustrates its value eloquently and convincingly, showing, in a dozen ways, how it inspires correctness and corrects errors. It is his universal solvent. He applies it in discussing questions of all sorts, the most practical as well as the most abstract. From it he derives a number of general principles which its pursuit of perfection involves. In the first place culture involves the ideal of perfection as residing in "an inward condition of the mind and spirit and not in an outward set of circumstances"; then as harmonious, an expansion of *all* the powers for beauty and for good of human nature; then as a *general* expansion wholly at variance, for example, with the maxim of "every man for himself." From this he deduces its salutary application to the phenomena of the large mechanical and external element in modern civilization, of our Anglo-Saxon individualism, of our want of flexibility, our concentration upon one aspect of a thing and our blindness to its other sides, our faith in "machinery" as an end in itself — the machinery variously known as free-

dom, population, railroads, wealth, churches, political institutions. It is evident that the idea of culture has endless applications. The chapter titles of "Culture and Anarchy" would suggest them to any one who had never read the book — "Sweetness and Light," "Doing as One Likes," "Barbarians, Philistines, Populace," "Hebraism and Hellenism" and so on. Numbers of epitomizing sentences from the same work might be cited to show them; for example: "No man, who knows nothing else, knows even his Bible," or, "And to be, like our honored and justly honored Faraday, a great natural philosopher with one side of his being and a Sandemanian with the other, would to Archimedes have been impossible." There are delicious pages in "Culture and Anarchy," and its vivacity no longer obscures its soundness, probably, even for readers of the temperament of those in whom when it first appeared it awakened discomfort if not dislike. Every one nowadays is theoretically a friend of culture — even the strenuous.

He was not particularly happy in dealing with America. He could not let us alone. He seemed to be haunted by the desire to subject us, also, to his discrimination. But he could not, I fancy, quite characterize us to his satisfaction. At least a tentativeness that is almost touching, certainly very charming, is to be felt in his most systematic efforts to do so. When he lectured here he was more than circumspect, he was cautious; yet at the same time he was very coura-

geously conscientious in what he said to us and of us. He was very desirous of complimenting us by avoiding flattery and of in this way increasing the value of what good he could say. The public no doubt "caught the idea," but he failed a little perhaps to convey its importance, to communicate to us the importance that he himself—most complimentarily—seemed to attach to it. Our public—even our lyceum public—though hospitable enough, is not very conscious of its need for the medicine of sincere and searching criticism. Its misgivings are few, and there is something lusty about its good nature. It imagines that it is something of a critic itself. It found something a little superfine and superfluous in the attempt to tell it delicately that it was gross.

The "Discourses in America" undoubtedly read better to-day than they sounded then. That on Emerson is surely one of the most appreciative as well as most discriminating things ever written about its subject, and is on a very high plane. The "Literature and Science" is delightful, a real *vade mecum* for the humanist. The discourse on "Numbers," however, which is the one most specially American in its subject and address, is, like the rest of his writings on America, decidedly less authoritative than his writings on almost any other theme. The fact is not surprising. As a theme we must be acknowledged to be tryingly inchoate, elusively heterogeneous. A still greater difficulty is presented by the absence of precedents in our

case. In a sense we are necessarily more unlike any European people than any European people is unlike any of its fellows. There is a break in environment which minimizes the element of ancestry in our evolution. And our inherited traits are modified by an altogether exceptional eclecticism in "institutions." The notion that underlies the discourse on "Numbers" is that we are essentially the English middle class, upper and lower, because we have no aristocracy and no populace—at least apart from immigration. The error is shared by most European writers about America, who forget that even the English middle class *unmodified* by either the aristocracy or the populace would be very different from its present self. Perhaps it might be less "vulgarized" if it had no "materialized" class to weigh it down, and no "brutalized" class to sustain its self-conceit. In any event, to preach to us the now famous doctrine of the remnant is to misconceive us. We have a "remnant" of our own whose activities instead of exalting our esteem of "remnants" tend to make us suspicious of them. It represents the survival of the fittest only through artificial selection, and, on the other hand, even if the rest of the nation were "sacrificed to it," as Arnold says the English are to the production of their aristocracy, the result would be less "splendid." He says somewhere that the English "have no people, only masses with vulgar tastes." But so far, at all events, and, as I say, immigration apart, our majority is exactly describable as "people"

rather than as "masses," with vulgar or, indeed, any other tastes. Our "average man," accordingly, other things being equal, is apt to inspire more confidence and receive more respect than our exceptional man—unless the latter be (like Lincoln, for example) simply our average man raised to a higher power. But even in his writings on America, where their application is occasionally less apt than elsewhere, Arnold's general principles are, as elsewhere, cogent, stimulant, and suggestive.

V

His distinction as a religious writer has been imperfectly perceived, which is singular, considering the very great religious influence that he has exerted. It consists in the way in which he has brought out the natural truth of Christianity. That is the sum and substance of "Literature and Dogma," of "God and the Bible," and of the "Last Essays on Church and Religion," even of "St. Paul and Protestantism." No one has felt more deeply, and no one has so clearly expressed this essence of religion denuded of dogma and stripped of the husks of its traditionary sanctions. To him religion was as definite a realm as poetry. He distinguished it from ethics in very much the way in which poetry differs from prose, and characterized it as "morality touched by emotion." Religious truth, even, he distinguished from scientific truth in saying that "truth of science does not become truth of religion

until it becomes religious." For a time his readers hardly knew what he meant. His gospel was so simple as to be startling. "Literature and Dogma" was taken to be an attack on at least a vital and integral part of Christianity. And it must be confessed that its sprightly rhetoric, through which, however, it got its hearing, gave some color of justification for the grief of the judicious, to whom what he called *Aberglaube* was inextricably bound up with the most precious verities. The solemn "Spectator" was betrayed, by temper, probably, into speaking of his ideal as Christianity without God—as Comte's scheme has been satirized as Catholicism minus Christianity. What was curiously called his theology seemed very superficial to the thoroughgoing, and aroused what, still more curiously, the Editor of his "Letters" has felt justified in calling "some just criticisms." Why "just"? one is tempted to ask at the present day when nearly the whole thinking world, save that portion of it committed to the defence of dogma, has practically, if insensibly, come to adopt his view that the sanction of religion is its natural truth. And that the natural truth of religion has not lost its hold on the non-clerical thinking world along with its traditionary "confessions" and their philosophy, is due primarily to the spirit that distinguishes between what is and what is not vital in the matter. This spirit inspires much religious writing at the present day. But Arnold's religious writing does more than assay the

alloy of popular Christianity. It advocates, commends, exalts the pure metal, points out its worth and its winningness, shows how important a part it plays in the development and discipline of one's highest self, eloquently magnifies mankind's legitimate concern in it, and convincingly establishes its claims and its rewards.

Nothing is more singular than the reticence with which religion is treated even by the religious. The sense of its being a private, an intimate and a sacred concern hardly accounts for it. It is true it is a matter of the heart, and about matters of the heart one is instinctively reserved. Then, too, the dread of seeming hypocrisy undoubtedly acts as a restraint. But that one of the greatest forces in the moral world should, merely as a subject of thought and speculation, receive only what may be called professional and esoteric attention is not thus to be explained. Theology is freely considered and discussed, increasingly less so, of course, as its sanctions come generally to seem insubstantial and as, in consequence, it loses interest. Yet dogma is at best limited and disputed formulary, whereas the principles with which it deals or misdeals are universal. The doctrine of the Trinity, for example, is a disputed and unverifiable dogma. The influence of the Holy Spirit, exquisitely called the Comforter, is a matter of actual experience, as solid a reality as that of electro-magnetism. But, the pulpit of course aside, the dogma has certainly occupied a more prominent place in the minds of men than the fact. The compar-

ative lack of interest in the more interesting theme is, one would say, inexplicable. Every one knows that, if he would, he could at once determine with his entire nature to "depart from iniquity," that he could, if he would, successfully accomplish this, and that the result would be the happiness, so far as happiness depends upon one's self, of which every one is in search — "the peace," in a word, "which passeth all understanding." Man's capability of utilizing this force is a matter of consciousness, and the effect of doing so is as demonstrably certain as the effect of combustion. It is difficult to see why it is not phenomenally as interesting. It is surely quite as important, quite as deserving the attention of the critic, quite as dignified and fruitful a secular theme. And in spite of this, in spite of its interest and its universality, it is relegated to the theologians.

The explanation doubtless is that, owing to various causes — the cathedral infallibility of the Church and the tyranny of Protestant "Biblism," for instance — theology and religion, dogma and natural truth, have been so closely and so long associated as to have become amalgamated. The natural history of dogma explains its despotism. The instinctive or empirical perception of truth out of which it is developed is lost sight of in the philosophic form it assumes in final definition. Its devotees come to feel, for example, that, to use Arnold's phrase, "salvation is attached to a right knowledge of the Godhead." On the other hand, those

minds on whom it loses its hold as its form gradually discloses its emptiness, forget its origin. Any formulation of the constitution of the "Godhead" seeming absurd when withdrawn from the sphere of logic and brought into that of consciousness, God Himself — whom, as Joubert says, it is "not hard to know if one does not force one's self to define Him" — is left out of all consideration. Dogma comes to seem, thus, an invention instead of a development, and, to crude minds, an interested invention. Nor is it crudity alone that thus misconceives it. The "liberal" temper itself, exasperated at its perversions, wars against its bases often. Heine speaks of "the fictitious quarrel which Christianity has cooked up between the body and the soul," as if St. Paul's antagonism between "the law of the members" and "the law of the mind" were not a matter of universal experience. Of the two tendencies, however, there can be no doubt which is in accord with the *Zeit-Geist* at the present time. It is dogma that has lost its hold on serious minds, and Arnold's great concern in his religious writings is to save religion from going with it.

He was himself of a deeply religious nature, and his religion was, of course, as any religiousness must be at the present day, actively Christian. People speak of Epictetus and of Marcus Aurelius as if there were something religious in paganism essentially extraneous to Christianity — as if born in later times within the fold of Christianity they would not, dogma aside, have

been as formally Christian as Melanchthon or Sir Thomas More. Had the "Discourses" been uttered in the thirteenth century Jesus would certainly have replaced Hercules in the passage in which Epictetus calls Hercules "the Son of God." Other people, who accept the fairy tale of popular religion as the only basis, and metaphysical theology as the only definition of Christianity, like the London "Spectator," accuse Arnold of being essentially an atheist — "just as," says Arnold, in "God and the Bible," "the heathen populace of Asia cried out against Polycarp: *'Away with the Atheists.'*" His own idea of the essence of Christianity he defines, in "St. Paul and Protestantism," as "something not very far, at any rate, from this: Grace and peace by the annulment of our ordinary self through the mildness and sweet reasonableness of Christ." This was the Christianity he sought to extricate from the desuetude into which both its mythology and its metaphysics have indubitably fallen. To any one who feels with him that religion is "the most lovable of things," no attempt could be more attractive or more important, be more properly a work of serious literature. He himself considered "Literature and Dogma" his most important work.

It is in the first place a constructive attempt. In the words of its secondary title it is "an essay toward a better apprehension of the Bible," and it was conceived and executed in the interests of the preservation of religion. To this end, it perforce exposed the in-

substantiality of the current misapprehension of the Bible—the proof from prophecy, the proof from miracles, and that from metaphysics. Many readers probably got no further than these luminous chapters, which, it is true, were written with a zest calculated to arouse the scepticism of the suspicious. The attack on metaphysics was certainly the least successful of this ground-clearing work. It was continued in "God and the Bible" and elaborated to a degree which may fairly be said to betray a consciousness of not having exactly hit off the matter. It was a depreciation in deference to his own predilections, which were literary and religious and not scientific, of what a whole order of serious minds rest their firmest convictions upon. In his treatment of the supernatural he professed to part from miracles with regret, from metaphysical proof with pleasure. There was something a little Olympian in this. As he says, miracles do not and never did happen. Metaphysics is at least a pseudo-science which can only be attacked in detail and only through its own terms, just as universal doubt is a self-contradictory affirmation. Nothing can be more salutary, nevertheless, for the many minds whose vice is content with abstractions, than his—extremely metaphysical and perhaps not too scientifically successful—attack on the fundamental concept of "being." It does not convince, but it cannot fail to enlighten. No vivacity, it is true, can obscure the fact that it is pure caricature to say: "Descartes could look out of his

window at Amsterdam, and see a public place filled with men and women, and say to himself that he had no right to be certain they were men and women, because they might after all be mere lay figures dressed up in hats and cloaks." But after all it is to be borne in mind that the metaphysical proof of a religious system is, like those from prophecy and miracles, merely a part of its apologetics and not of its appeal.

It is its appeal, its constructive side, that, as I say, constitutes the essential part of "Literature and Dogma." Its cardinal proposition is that the Bible is literature and not dogma, and that so to consider it is the preliminary to a right and adequate estimate of it. Having contended for an absolute divorce between religion and theology in the interests of essential Christianity, he proceeds by treating the Bible as *literature* to draw out in a positive way its natural, real and verifiable value as a religious document. No commentator on the Scriptures has ever accomplished a more cogent and seductive work than his showing of the *use* to which the truly religious soul may put the book of which it is a commonplace that it is the Book of Books, but which readers who have come to discredit the dogma based upon its misapprehension have come completely to neglect. But aside from this specific service in emphasizing the value as literature, as poetry, as criticism of life, of the Bible, his religious writings are also a rational and eloquent exposition of the attractiveness of religion itself. He made religion

a theme, a topic, of literature. He brought out its general interest and rescued it from the hands of the specialist. He treated it as properly a branch of culture. He awakened in his serious readers inclined to regard it as negligible a certain dissatisfaction and sense of incompleteness.

Even in detail his services to religion are considerable. To take a single instance: No idea of modern times has been more fruitful, in the sense of forwarding the true, that is to say the spiritual, interests of religion than his favorite one that the sole justification of separatism is moral and not doctrinal. Nothing has more successfully warred against "the communion of the saints" than the contrary opinion, which may be said to be native to Protestantism. The Reformation —"the real Reformation, the German Reformation, Luther's Reformation," as he calls it — was, in his words, "a reaction of the moral and spiritual sense against the carnal and pagan sense"; it was "a religious revival like St. Francis's." The Christian Church, he says, is founded "not on a correct speculative knowledge of the ideas of Paul, but on the much surer ground: 'Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity'; and holding this to be so, we might change the current strain of doctrinal theology from one end to the other, without, on that account, setting up any new church or bringing in any new religion." His appreciation of the religious value of unity is no doubt largely due to his traditional feelings for the

Church of England and his traditional antagonism to Nonconformity. "The Evangelicals," he says, "have not added to their first error of holding this unsound body of opinions the second error of separating for them." Of course his preoccupation with the Church and the Nonconformists in his illustrations and argumentation limits his public. It is all rather *aliunde* to Americans, for example, even to American Churchmen. But it is easy for any reflecting reader to understand his meaning in saying, for example, "Man worships best in common; he philosophizes best alone." And it is not difficult to seize the significance of his central idea that mere doctrinal differences do not justify a dissolution of that union in which there is strength as much in religious as in other matters with which man's moral nature is mainly concerned — patriotism, for example, or the feeling for the life of the family.

VI

THE virtue of all his criticism — literary, social and religious — is revealed, not to say enhanced, by the limpidity of his style. It is perhaps a matter of personal feeling, but it seems to me that limpidity at least suggests, if it does not express, a shade of more positive quality than is conveyed by clearness. At any rate in noting the limpidity of Arnold's style what I have in mind is the medium rather than the directness of his expression. We know very well nowadays what is

ordinarily meant by clearness of style. It is a quality that we owe to the natural and one might almost say the involuntary evolution accompanying the effort to express ideas constantly growing in complexity and increasingly involved in their relations and suggestions. Mr. Spencer's famous style is, as it were, a weapon developed out of the necessities of the case. Style like his, which is currently not very uncommon, is the perfection of what is called "good English" — an instrument enabling the writer to convey his thought to the reader without losing any of its energy on the way. It is the opposite of such a style as Mr. Pater contrived for himself, in which, as Mr. Max Beerbohm observes, he treated English "as a dead language." Its characteristic, however, is, equally with clearness, lack of color. In this respect it may almost be called the off-hand style — it is so summary, so careless of perfection of any kind save that of adequate expression, so contemptuous of anything like persuasion, so superior to ornament, so disdainful of emotion. It is the style with which in polemics one defies the reader to deny and makes no effort otherwise to convince; and it is singular how it tends to polemics, how little literature has been written in it.

On the other hand, there is the clearness of Thackeray, of whom Carlyle says: "I suppose no one in our day wrote with such perfection of style." Thackeray's clearness is notably marked by color, but it is color taken from the writer's personality, and except for its

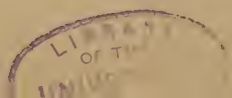
supreme quality of taste, seems the means rather than the medium of his expression — no doubt the finest effect producible by prose. Arnold's clearness, on the contrary, is felt as an element of technic, and has that quality of density which pleases as a property of a palpable medium. It is pellucid, limpid. One notes it as he does a certain clarity of tone in a painter's technic, a certain explicitness of modelling in a sculptor's touch. It has the air of being not so much instinctive as arrived at. A great deal is done with it. It is elaborately limpid, one may say. It has a tincture of virtuosity. He plays with it beautifully, bringing out into relief certain shadings and subduing certain others in contrasting lower-toned transparencies — as a pianist of distinction not only interprets his composer but exhibits his instrument at the same time. In a word, he makes his lucidity count æsthetically. At times he grows over-fond of it, as is the inherent danger of all exploitation, especially the sincerest; at times it shows excess and runs into a mannerism of iteration at which in another Arnold himself would be the first to wince. The four times repeated "Scotch drink, Scotch religion, and Scotch manners," within the limits of a single paragraph of his consideration of Burns, is "hard to read without a cry of pain," as he said of a distich of Macaulay. Less formally the remorselessly renewed appearances of "the Bishops of Winchester and Gloucester" in the beginning of "Literature and Dogma" are irritating intrusions. These and similar

instances are examples of explicitness run to seed. But they are the defect of a quality, and due to an excess of a dilettante spirit of playfulness to which we owe very much that is acutely charming in Arnold's writings. They are not inherent in his style at its best. At its best in this respect of limpidity a page of his — a page of "Literature and Dogma" itself — reads like a page of the "Apology," in its elaborate and elevated Socratic clearness.

To this quality thus æsthetically "handled" he adds an equally positive and sensible beauty of diction. It is not the beautiful liquid flow, rhythmic, cadenced and prolonged, of Newman's. But if less sinuous it has more strength; it has greater poise and an apter precision. Compared, too, with the beauty of such prose as Ruskin's, it has a certain savor of soundness, a sense of conscious subscription to what Ruskin himself, speaking of Venetian architecture, calls "the iron laws of beauty"—that is to say, subscription to the proprieties of prose, without yielding to the solicitations of the spirit of poetry which outside its own domain is sure to be irresponsible and indiscreet. There are, for example, many "passages" in Arnold's writing memorable for their beauty. Every one remembers the apostrophe to Oxford. The close of the essay on Falkland, the description of the Greek poetry of imaginative reason in the essay on "Pagan and Mediæval Religious Sentiment," the sentences of the essay on Keats: "'I think,' said Keats, humbly, 'I

shall be among the English poets after my death.' He is. He is with Shakespeare," are other examples of sobriety surcharged with feeling exquisitely characteristic of the grave discretion proper to the province of prose, mindful of its limits as well as conscious of its capabilities. And they and others like them are beautiful, as prose poetry is not, for the very reason that they are so explicably founded in fitness. But his diction in general is noteworthy for the same quality. It is penetrated with the sentiment of the significance it expresses and never self-hypnotizes. It is too significant to be "musical," but its straightforwardness is very sensitively organized. Its obvious elegance is not the elegance of detachment, but is elegance leavened with personal feeling — now pushed by personal feeling to the point of piquancy, now restrained within the confines of mere suggestion, but informed by it always.

And for the same reason it is never polished into insipidity. Always full of intention, it is never style for its own sake. One feels that the writer is partial to his style, that he models it consciously and is perfectly aware of it as an element of effectiveness, but it is the dress of too much virility to absorb and preoccupy, however much it may interest, him. It is careful but it is genuine, high-bred but vigorous, studied but simple, considered but considered as form merely. Its urbanity is at times a trifle express— especially in controversy—but it is urbanity associated



with too much point ever to be mistaken for approbativeness. It is obviously the style of a writer who adds to their lustre in maintaining the traditions. "Suckled on Latin and weaned on Greek," some one asserted of Dr. Arnold's children, and the classic strain is naturally distinguishable enough in Matthew Arnold's style—in its stuff as well as in its syntax. But it is not in the least academic—it is too modern, too flexible, too much the offspring of English parentage. Its vocabulary is less remarkable for range than for felicity; in felicity it is as remarkable as Tennyson's; indeed with equal aptness—equal *justesse*—its felicity is even more marked than Tennyson's, because it is more instinctive, and instinctiveness is a constituent of felicity. Neither is felicity confined to his vocabulary. His phrases are famous.

This combination of limpidity, beauty and culture, consciously co-operating in the production of an explicit medium, exploited rather than dissembled, has for its notablest result perhaps the circumstance that Arnold's style is, as style, the most interesting of any of the writers of our day. I say *as* style, because though I think Thackeray's surpasses it in interest, it does so in virtue of the inimitable color of a more interesting and omnipresent personality. Thackeray's apart, at all events, there is no other that in respect of interest approaches Arnold's if we take his writings in the mass. His writings taken in the mass gain immensely from their style. Interesting as his substance

is, it would be distinctly less so but for the art of its presentation. One has only to think of any of his books written otherwise to feel at once that it would be less captivating. By interest, of course, I mean the feeling that is stimulated by what is admirable, interest within lines of laudability, an artistic interest, in a word—not the thrill aroused by dithyramb, or eccentricity, or picturesqueness, or any of the various forms of rhetoric which often create an effect whose intensity is altogether disproportionate to its duration. In any theme of Arnold's one is interested in how he takes it, how it is conceived, exhibited, enforced, in the way in which its own intrinsic interest is unfolded, in the adaptation itself of the means to the end. It is not "the grand style." As he says, the grand style is to be found only in poetry, and to my sense he is not a great poet. But he has the style, if not of a great writer, at least of an admirable, a unique, literary artist.

VII

It is frequently and truly remarked of Arnold's poetry that it never can be popular. But this is not because there is anything particularly esoteric about it, and the assumption that it appeals particularly to the elect is largely unfounded. It is, at all events, better than *that*. It is not in any exclusive sense that Mr. Lang and Mr. Augustine Birrell find it intimately consoling. Others enjoy it in the same way, though,

of course, whether or no in the same degree it would be impossible to determine. But it is poetry that never can be popular because it appeals to moods that are infrequent. It is intimately consoling if you are in a mood that needs consolation, and consolation of a severely stoic strain. Otherwise it is not. Now, most people are either rarely in such a mood, or, when they are, demand consolation that stimulates instead of stifling their self-pity. The poetry, like the music, that intensifies one's mood is inevitably more popular than that which contradicts it. And, of course, the stoical mood being far rarer than the sensuous, sensuous poetry will always be surer of a welcome than stoical. It makes a slighter demand on the faculties, and whatever requires effort is proportionally unwelcome. "Stanzas written in dejection near Naples," or near anywhere else, please us, because savoring them involves no tension. A passionate lyric of Byron or a plaintive one of Keats finds us much more readily responsive than Arnold's austere verses on "Self-dependence," which invoke an energy that in most men is at best intermittent. For this reason his plaintive, or, if one chooses, his pessimistic, strain, is more moving to most readers than his stimulant and inspiring note. The lines beginning: "Strew on her roses, roses," in spite of their rather tame conclusion, the intimately pathetic quatrain beginning: "What renders vain their deep desire," the first part of "Rugby Chapel," with its deepening shadows and enshrouding gloom, will always

be favorites over those of his poems that celebrate the activities of the will. Yet the latter are the more numerous and by far the more characteristic.

I do not mean to assert that the militant mood is less prevalent to-day than the purely receptive one, so far as regards the appreciation of poetry. Verse like Scott's "One crowded hour of glorious life," would awaken the same thrill, perhaps, as ever, if there were any of it. Browning's popularity is, indeed, probably growing. But this is a mood to which Arnold never appeals. His poetry is in the mass addressed to the mood of moral elevation, and it would be fatuity to contend that this is a frequent frame of mind. For the most part we come to the reading of poetry in an unmoral mood. We respond to the æsthetic appeal a thousand times more readily than to the moral. How many readers would agree with Arnold in preferring the "Ode to Duty" to that on the "Intimations of Immortality"? His argument is unimpeachable. The former is sound, the latter fantastic. But are we often in a mood to be as thrilled by the lines,

> "Nor know we anything so fair
> As is the smile upon thy face,"

as we are by the images and cadences of the certainly more popular poem? There are certainly times in which simply to be good seems the one thing worth striving for to, no doubt, the worst of us. There are moments when the will welcomes the mastery of virtue

and solicits fusion with the good in absolute self-surrender — moments when the heart is touched with fire from the altar of rectitude, and the sweetness and joy of being at one with the most vital principle in the universe flood the soul with balm. It is the ideal, not of poetry, but of religion, however, to multiply such moments and render permanent this transitory condition. And though, as Arnold says, "the best part of religion is its unconscious poetry," its unconscious religion is but a small part of poetry, speaking comparatively, and in Arnold's poetry there is nothing unconscious at all. It is extremely express; and, although to say so is not to deny that it is genuine, its genuineness takes a clearly calculated form. It must dispense with the aid of that unconscious religion which animates Wordsworth, even when he is doctoral and dogmatic. His popular appeal is, therefore, still more limited than Wordsworth's because his inspiration, though morally elevated, like Wordsworth's, is restricted within the confines of intellectual intention and lacks the self-abandonment to transfigured impulse which Wordsworth eminently shows to be as much within the province of morally elevated poetry as of any other. It lacks exaltation. Moreover, it lacks the exultant quality which Arnold himself signalizes as Wordsworth's true greatness — "the joy offered to us in nature, the joy offered to us in the simple primary affections and duties." It is never joyous; joyousness is the one quality above all others which it never has.

On its æsthetic side, too, its reliances are few. In the mass it is unmusical — at least in the sense of being independent of music as a reliance. It is absurd to find it cacophonous, as is sometimes asserted, and to maintain that its author had no ear — though, perhaps, had his ear been more sensitive he would not have cited Keats's "peaceful citadel" as "quiet citadel." There are metres which he handled with instinctive felicity — witness "Heine's Grave," "Rugby Chapel," "A Forsaken Merman." But they are not, so to say, musical metres. His repugnance to balladry, his recoil from sing-song, his partisanship for the hexameter, are significant. His feeling for the slower vibrations of rhythm in the citations he holds up as models almost indicates a preference for intonation to song. Quoting Gray's statement that "the style he aimed at was extreme conciseness of expression, yet pure, perspicuous and musical," he says that Gray is "alone or almost alone (for Collins has something of the like merit) in his age." Compare with this the celebration of Collins by Mr. Swinburne, who is a master of music in poetry, whose verse is often music *et præterea nihil:* "There was but one man in the time of Collins who had in him a note of pure lyric song, a pulse of inborn music irresistible and indubitable; and that he was that man he could not open his lips without giving positive and instant proof. The Muse gave birth to Collins; she did but give suck to Gray." An examination of Arnold's poetry would show many musical lines, sometimes a

happy note like a sudden bird call, a thrilling dactyl, a tetrasyllable of liquid cadence enforced by appositeness recalling Keats himself. But at the same time these are elbowed by awkwardnesses of scansion, eccentricities of ictus, and now and then a positive cessation of lyric tone as though in obedience to the rubric "spoken."

Poetic quality, too, is sometimes as lacking as musical. The two are certainly to be distinguished, and Arnold's verse is far more rarely unpoetic than it is unmusical. But of course poetry that has not a musical interpretation falls just so far short of being poetically perfect. Dispensing with the reliance of rhythmic felicity it is necessarily thrown back more or less boldly on the unaided poetic value of its substance, and a formal rather than magical expression of it. Aside from this so far as its lack of poetic quality is to be felt as a shortcoming in Arnold's poetry, it is due, I think, to the fact that his pursuit of the Muse is a shade systematic. The turn for criticism, which is an integral part of his genius, gives it a theoretic tincture, at the least. He thought a great deal about poetry, about what it should be, what line it should take, what inspiration the poets of the future should seek. No one has written more acutely or more fruitfully about it. But at the same time it, perhaps naturally, followed that when he came himself to illustrate his principles he was preoccupied with their application in a degree that modified his possession by his theme. He was conscious of his art instead of absorbed in his

subject, with the natural result now and then of polishing his poetry into prose instead of "letting it model itself," as a painter would say, under the guidance of his tact.

In the suggestive "Prefaces" to the first and second editions of his poems, he lays down a number of poetical requirements with the utmost penetration. Among others he emphasizes "the all-importance of the choice of a subject," and he indicates what in a general way that choice should be. Nothing could be better. But practically the consequence of a poet's specific reflection upon the choice of a subject is not such a work as the "Antigone," or any of the Greek models Mr. Arnold is recommending. It is not such a poem as "In Memoriam," or, to take a crucial instance, "The Ring and the Book." It is such a poem as "Sohrab and Rustum." "Sohrab and Rustum" is a beautiful and, at the climax, a moving poem. But as a whole it has a fatal lack of spontaneity. The choice of the subject has been too carefully made and the treatment is too theoretic. It is not personal and romantic enough. Its romance and individuality of treatment are too tranquilly contained within the limits of the form, and the form is an exotic. It is not that it is artificial. Tennyson is artificial. But Tennyson can be personal without ceasing to be even conventional. His artificiality is a natural expression. He is not hampered by his significance, which he handles in high differentiation as easily as if it were

even less significant than — owing to its universal acceptance — it often is. A poet, however, who is first of all a thinker, needs to give his feeling a freer rein and, whatever his theories about poetry in general, forget their application in his specific effort for adequately poetic statement.

Arnold's poetry is, at all events, penetrated with thought, and this forms its true distinction. It is indeed the fulness of its significance that embarrasses its expression both in musical and in more subtly poetic form. Of course, had his genius possessed either what he himself calls the "natural magic" of the Celt or the "Greek radiance" it would have carried his thought more easily. But it is a reflective and philosophic genius, and accordingly its sincerest poetical expression savors a little of statement rather than of song. And to endue statement with poetic quality a more inevitable and exclusive poetic vocation than his is requisite. He does, it is true, suffuse it with feeling, but with feeling whose pertinence and poise are perhaps a little too prominently irreproachable. "Genius is mainly an affair of energy, and poetry is mainly an affair of genius," he says very truly, and it is, in the last analysis, probably energy that his poetry lacks to give it greater currency and greater charm. Around greater energy his numbers would crystallize in more eloquent, more moving combination. They would have more buoyancy, more freedom, a larger sweep, a more sustained flight. For this reason the narrative and dramatic

poems have less attraction than the elegiac and lyric, and for this reason even the lyric poems are contemplative rather than impassioned. It would hardly be amiss to call some of his verse cogent.

But, as I say, its penetration with significance forms its true distinction, and if his energy is insufficient to rank him in poetic quality with the "born poets" of his calibre, nevertheless the quality of his thought establishes such a balance in his poetic gifts and acquirements that his poetry, taken as a whole, gives him an honorable and a unique place in their company. It is not fatuity that makes him say that "with less poetical sentiment than Tennyson and less intellectual vigor and abundance than Browning" his poetry has "perhaps more of a fusion of the two than either of them." And it has the great advantage of being, so far as its characteristic quality of thought is concerned, admirably representative of the combined thought and feeling of the era. Our generation probably atones somewhat for feeling less simply, less strenuously than the last, by attuning its feeling more closely to its thinking; and perhaps the next will witness such interest in new complications of thinking, born of increased multifariousness of phenomena for its exercise, that feeling will become still less agitated and independent than it is to-day.

And of feeling that is legitimated by the tribunal of reason, Arnold is the poet *par excellence.* His attempts to illustrate the theories of his "Prefaces" may

be in form too conscious, too much an echo of the models he holds up, but in feeling his poetry is in the main the personal expression of a poet who is genuinely a follower and not an imitator of the poets of that "century in Greek life," to quote his own words "—the century preceding the Peloponnesian war, from about the year 530 to the year 430 B.C.—in which poetry made, it seems to me, the noblest, the most successful effort she has yet made as the priestess of the imaginative reason, of the element by which the modern spirit, if it would live right, has chiefly to live." His inspiration is certainly what he calls "the imaginative reason," neither "the senses and the understanding" by which he says the poetry of later paganism lived, nor "the heart and the imagination" of the poetry of mediæval Christianity. One may say that his reason a little overbalances his imagination, but it is certainly true that his imagination in the very circumstance of being thus solidly sustained not only avoids the weakness of insubstantiality, but operates positively with increased eloquence and elasticity because it is the servant only of that reason whose service is perfect freedom. An elementary is as good as a recondite illustration. Take, for example, the way in which such a theme as immortality is treated by a poet purely of the heart, like Whittier, in the lines:

> "Yet Love will dream, and Faith will trust
> (Since He who knows our need is just)
> That somehow, somewhere, meet we must."

The lines are true poetry, and, taken with their context, they are touching; no one with memories can be unresponsive to them. But they are no longer convincing, because their basis is insubstantial. Compare with them this stanza of Arnold's from "Rugby Chapel," and its context:

> "O strong soul, by what shore
> Tarriest thou now? For that force,
> Surely, has not been left vain!
> Somewhere, surely, afar,
> In the sounding labor-house vast
> Of being, is practised that strength,
> Zealous, beneficent, firm."

Here we are in the world of reason. We are still among assumptions, no doubt, but we have exchanged pure sentiment for poetic speculation, and a conventional for an imaginative treatment. Arnold goes on:

> "Yes, in some far-shining sphere,
> Conscious or not of the past,—"

He will be betrayed into no claim, in the region of the unverifiable, which reason would not, in recognizing its own limits, acquiesce in as properly within the jurisdiction of the imagination. Thus the reader of Arnold's poetry never has to say to himself: "But it is not true!" And to the sense of our own day this is fundamental in poetry as elsewhere.

And not only does his poetry satisfy because it is sound without being conventional, but truth is positively its inspiration as well as its guide. It is truth that stirs his imagination. It is the divination of some broad or subtle verity of the soul, seized by his delicate apprehension, that suggests its poetic inference to his imagination, sets it aglow with light and suffuses it with elevated feeling. The experience of the soul amid the phenomena among which in our complicated era it passes its existence — its moments of gloom, of aspiration, its disillusions, its yearning sadness, its sense of the heavy burden of clairvoyance, and the withdrawal of old solaces and supports, its wistful glances into the penumbra of the verifiable, and its tragic certitude of seeing, in the sphere of attainment, the ideal decline in compromise — these and similar phases of the spiritual life of our time have found expression in Arnold's poetry as they have nowhere else. And their expression has been not only true, but truly imaginative. He was quite right. He occupies a place by himself. He inhabits the serene uplands of poetic thought, where the mind and the soul receive, at least at intervals, a stimulant sustenance, however rarefied the atmosphere may seem to the quite otherwise exigent demands of that æsthetic sense whose activity is less intermittent.

RUSKIN

RUSKIN

I

Ruskin left his interesting "Autobiography" unfinished, but otherwise his life-work was substantially complete long ago; the main interest of the "Autobiography," in fact, is that it is a discursive commentary on this life-work already rounded and already a public possession. He was born in 1819, the son of a rich wine merchant, and was graduated at Christ Church College, Oxford, at the age of twenty, receiving the Newdigate prize for poetry. It is a great pity in many ways that he did not accept this good fortune as an omen, and consecrate himself thenceforth to the service of the Muses. He was certainly a born poet, but he abandoned poetry for prose at his graduation, and never seriously returned to it. He was soon heard from in a work published anonymously as by "An Oxford Graduate," and destined to become speedily famous, first for its style, and second for its ideas. The style was absolutely novel; it was in an exceptional degree "the man"; it was the prose of a true poet, and at once took rank as the first of that product of unrestrained genius known as "prose poetry." The ideas were equally novel. They were subversive of accepted

commonplaces, fanatically professed articles of a new faith, and characterized by an ingrained contentiousness. All Ruskin is in the "Modern Painters," which, as every one knows, was an eloquent and fervid glorification of landscape and of the superior way in which it had been painted by certain English painters of the present era, notably Turner — *mirabile dictu*, who systematically violated every article of the Ruskin creed — compared with its insufficient treatment by the old masters. The five volumes of this surprising work revolutionized English feeling on the subject with which they dealt. It may safely be asserted that no writer ever "made" a man as Ruskin did Turner. Plato did less for Socrates.

From that time on every work of the new author was greeted with applause and read with avidity. His activity branched out into a dozen different directions. His publications were on the most discordant subjects. Church government and discipline, political economy, the complexities of modern life, as well as nature and fine art, were discussed by him with equal ardor and authoritative tone. To say he was equally at home upon them all would be to claim a universality and comprehensiveness of mind which he not only certainly did not possess, but, contrariwise, most conspicuously lacked. But he endued them all with a very nearly even interest by his strenuous personality, his extraordinary intensity. The record and critique of these works comprise the history of his life, which was otherwise uneventful.

The interest of his "Autobiography" is purely subjective — too much so for so elaborate a work; no man's spiritual development can be so valuable to others as the scale of the "Autobiography" implies.

He was early married, but allowed his wife to obtain a divorce from him in order to marry the painter with whom she had fallen in love, whose work also he began forthwith to eulogize with his customary eloquence. The incident illustrates his intensity and lack of poise; in the pursuit of saintliness, measure had no interest for him. So far as material circumstances are concerned, he ordered his life as he would. With his genius, his tastes and his equipment, what he might have made of it is imaginatively quite as impressive as what he did. He inherited great wealth; his literary gains were among the greatest of modern times; he accumulated great treasures: and he died poor, having dissipated his whole substance designedly in the service and for the benefit of his fellow-men. To note the quixotism of his benevolence would be ungracious, were it not so strikingly the counterpart of the quixotism of his mind as to mark the singleness of his nature. His unselfishness was as notable as his self-will. He *payait de sa personne;* he gave everything, himself included — a procedure that, if not in every respect exemplary, is at any rate too exceptional to excite the uneasiness of even the wise and prudent. It is not, however, the way either to influence one's future fellow-men or to raise to one's self a literary monument *perennius ære.*

He was twice elected Slade Professor of Poetry at Oxford. He founded the St. George Society — a kind of community in which, in accordance with his views of private life and political economy, human nature was to be ennobled by manual labor and eschewing manufactured articles. One wonders if he had ever read "The Blithedale Romance." He took a great interest in workingmen, and for several years published a journal for them with the edifying title "Fors Clavigera." Much of his life was passed on the Continent, where he made long and elaborate examinations of the monuments of plastic art there. Of his works, besides "Modern Painters," the most celebrated and the most useful are the results of his travel and residence in Italy and France. "The Seven Lamps of Architecture" and "The Stones of Venice," with the "Modern Painters," probably comprise all of his product that will last through the epoch of indifference to much that the present age has delighted in, which we can readily perceive to be already upon us. Beautiful fragments, bits of real literature such as are worthily called gems — "The Ethics of the Dust," for instance, and "Sesame and Lilies" — will undoubtedly pass into the literary limbo of the future because of their lack of substance. As Carlyle said long ago, "everything not made of asbestos is going to be burned." There is, even in a purely literary sense, exceedingly little "asbestos" to be found in the sum of Mr. Ruskin's works.

II

It is not, indeed, hazardous to venture the prophecy that posterity will find his writings lacking in form as to style, and lacking in substance as to matter. He was to an extraordinary degree a pure sentimentalist, and there are many signs that the day of the pure sentimentalists is over. He was not, in fact, of his own time. He made a great impress upon it, it is true. He not only revolutionized the state of feeling in regard to fine art in England, did wonders both for the awakening of the humdrum, the matter-of-fact and the philistine element of English society to the vital truth and real beauty of art, and against the conventionality theretofore accepted as artistic beauty and truth — he made a very deep moral impression upon many serious minds, who still regard him (such is the chaotic condition of our culture) as an evangelist rather than as a mere writer upon fine art. This is the way in which he wished to be regarded; and he expressly regrets having wasted so much force upon æsthetics which he might else have devoted to morals and politics.

But his success in all these regards was, as we can now see, due to special causes, and consequently ephemeral. He was of his time only in representing the reactionary feeling common to all epochs. He was, as it were, flung off by one of those occasional excesses of the centrifugal motion of a period. To the weary he

was consoling; he soothed the despondent; he gratefully flattered the disgusted, the unsuccessful, those who felt themselves out of harmony with the way the world was going. There are always such persons, and consolation for them is always developed, and in this sense Ruskin's message to them may be called a natural evolution, especially as they were particularly numerous and particularly in need of consolation at the beginning of our industrial era. But representative of the best spirit, of the courage and the faith of his time, Ruskin certainly was not. There is more of this to be found in Byron — where, indeed, there is a great deal of it to be found, by the way.

The best spirit, the faith and courage of this or any other time, must be interpreted from a standpoint that recognizes and does not flout its unalterable conditions. In any other position one does but beat the air. There is more stimulus in Carlyle's single epithet "Captains of Industry" than in all Ruskin. The most elementary utility would dictate on the one hand the rationalization of the optimism which prevailed perhaps more widely in Ruskin's day than at present, and on the other the winnowing of the chaff of decadence from the grain of potential germination that certainly never existed in such profusion as it does to-day. The means by which "joy" is "in widest commonalty spread" were never so numerous or so efficient. The development of the social unit has never reached so high a point, and the possible achievements of social co-opera-

tion have never seemed so nearly attainable. Erudition was never carried so far nor education so broadly disseminated. Faith was never so completely divorced from superstition nor morals so nearly automatic. Well-being was never so nearly universal nor opportunity so opulently abundant. And — what is not sufficiently borne in mind — criticism has for the first time become a powerful controlling, constructive and corrective force. In a word, the "note" of the time is expansion, development, exercise of one's faculties. With the material side of this we are all familiar, of course. Its spiritual side has since Goethe been marked by a turning toward mind rather than toward sentiment. The higher reaches henceforth are found unsatisfactory if they are pervaded merely or chiefly by emotion. In this sense Ruskin is altogether mediæval.

Now nineteenth-century mediævalism is not only a paradox, but the next thing to an impossibility. Indeed — although if obliged to sum up in one word what seems to me the vice of Ruskin's gospel, I should say its mediævalism — such is the perverse irony of the nature of things that Ruskin himself is lacking in certain of the most important characteristics of the mediæval spirit — simplicity and humility, for instance. There are most assuredly traits of mediævalism that are of perennial value — *vide* Carlyle's "Past and Present," *passim*. But to preach them successfully one must be not merely fanatical, but simple; not merely

eloquent, but persuasive. "Carlyle and I only are left," observed Ruskin once. The association is absurd. It reminds one of the association sometimes made of Carlyle and Coleridge, with whom Ruskin had a far greater affinity. It has been brilliantly remarked of Coleridge that he "had no morals," and in the same way Ruskin can be said to have had convictions only by extension. He was absurdly mercurial, which means of course that his convictions did not really convince him. Terribly self-conscious in everything else, he was perfectly unconscious in his ignorance of this. He was, no doubt, thoroughly sincere in fancying his intensity of emotion a mark of reality of conviction, which, as an analytic age has discovered, it is very far from being. His passion for formulating his paradoxes, organizing his whimsies, making a credo of his fancies, for demonstrating, proselyting, disputing, illustrating his general principles by specific examples, fortifying his positions by proofs, and so on—in short, the predominance of the polemic element in his works —indicates how superficial is his mediævalism itself in everything but intensity of unmixed emotion. The one essential resemblance between him and St. Francis is his exaltation. Fancy St. Francis as the founder of the St. George Society! He undoubtedly made many people see the side by which St. Francis is superior to Theocritus, but it may be said that any one nowadays who is especially grateful for such a service is likely to receive more harm than good from it. St. Francis

himself has irrevocably gone by. Rehabilitated by Ruskin, he becomes not only grotesque but injurious, because we only get the sentimental side of him, and the future is clearly not to sentimentalism.

III

To this predominance of the emotional sense over the thinking power is undoubtedly due the didacticism which is the prominent strain in all his writings. It appears by no means exclusively in his practical preachments. It pervades his writing on art as well. And it is not necessary to subscribe to the doctrine of "art for art's sake" in order to justify one's dissatisfaction with it. This maxim has a temperamental rather than an intellectual appeal and can therefore be endlessly and profitlessly debated. On the one hand, one is tempted to adjure its opponents to consider art, if not for its own sake, then for the sake of anything they choose, but not while ostensibly occupying themselves with it to be really concerned about something else. On the other hand, one feels like asking its partisans to consider the claims of reason as well as of beauty, since indeed beauty is but reason expressed in form, and to remember that the mind has its æsthetic needs as well as the senses. Art is not altogether an esoteric or artificial affair, cut off from man's legitimate and absorbing moral preoccupation and handed over to the keeping of a caste composed of votaries of the pleasures of the

senses. No one can stand on the Athenian Acropolis or in the Medici Chapel, or walk through the Vatican Stanze, without feeling himself in the presence of an epitome of a whole civilization's moral quality. The impression one receives is ultimately a moral impression. The sentiment awakened is a moral sentiment. Sentiment, indeed, means moral sentiment; it is impossible to feel unmorally. The mere terminology we apply to the æsthetic elements of form and color — such epithets as noble, elevated, trivial, serious, debased — are the counters of moral values. Considered in the most practical way, considered in its concrete phases of plasticity — those phases that preoccupied Ruskin — art has its universal relations.

These relations, however, real and important as they are, are dictated by its character. They are quite distinct from those of the tract or the sermon or the celebration of the 104th Psalm. And to this vital circumstance Ruskin never gave the least heed. To treat art as he treated it is to twist it out of the direction plainly indicated by its own inherent tendency, to divert it from the true channel between it and the universal moral ideal of man's motive and aspiration, to snap the native ties that bind it to its own supreme justification of moral significance — to deny, in effect, that it as well as other "modes of motion" has its own legitimate and particular province as an expression of the soul. The sanctions of art are undoubtedly ultimately moral. But so are the sanctions of everything

else — everything of any real significance. And didactically to merge art in ethics, instead of considering it as an individual element of man's general moral activity, is as puerile as it would be thus to merge philosophy. It is notoriously the vice of the characteristic English treatment of art that it does this. His English environment does a great deal to impose it on any writer. But Ruskin — aside from the fact that nothing was ever extraneously imposed upon his wilfulness — met the expectations of his environment, one may say, very much more than half-way. Indeed, the extravagance with which he illustrated this point of view, reducing it practically *ad absurdum*, is probably accountable for the almost complete decline in his once prodigious influence.

His illustration of the specifically moral theory of art, however, did not spring from an inadequate philosophy of the subject. The work of no such incontestable and spontaneous genius as his ever perhaps springs from an inadequate philosophy. It has a clear temperamental genesis. Temperamentally he was all of a piece — as his abundant self-contradictions eloquently testify. No writer was ever more so. And his temperament was that of unalloyed didacticism. So that he not only celebrates the didactic element in art, the element that can be used didactically, at least — often by twisting it out of the intention of the artist and seeing purpose in what is mere presentation; he takes it universally as a text from which to preach,

himself. He is always preaching. He has the tone of the conventicle. He is never content with stating, explaining and fortifying his ideas. He is persistently engaged in imposing them. His attitude is always the attitude of superiority, that of the teacher to the pupil. He instructs inveterately. He can hardly say the simplest thing without commending it to the reader as a rule of action or avoidance, something to be especially pondered, to cherish, to shun, to doubt, to believe, or what not.

When he abandoned art altogether, as except for occasional recurrences to it he did with "Unto this Last," he was at least more completely in his native element. The futility of his social and economic preaching—which was certainly conspicuous—in no wise compromises the harmoniousness of his consecration to it with his native tastes and capacities. As he says himself: "These writings of mine, so far as they are essays upon art, have been often interrupted—and even warped and broken perhaps—by digressions respecting certain social questions in which I have always had an interest tenfold greater than I have in the matters I have been driven into undertaking." On these questions sciolism is perhaps not less objectionable than it is in æsthetic writing, but they have a legitimate philanthropic side that better justifies his didactic bent. Here, at all events, it comes out in all its energy, and some of his admirers find here his truer justification as a "prophet." Yet enjoyment of the

prophetic strain unsupported by sound substance must always seem a little singular to any but a rococo or a rude taste, one would say. Culture is perhaps a little intolerant of didacticism in any case, but it may excusably be easily surfeited by the frenzy of didacticism divorced from its utility. And the prophets from whom Ruskin got his tone would, we may be sure, have adopted a different one with a modern and occidental public, all questions even of the difference between his and their "messages" aside. One would like to know how his employment in the discussion of art and economics of all the rhetorical apparatus that he borrowed from them, his abuse of "the words 'Providence' and 'He,'" as Thoreau says, all the "Biblism," in short, which forms so large a part of his rhetorical stock in trade and gives a subtly factitious cogency to his extravagances, would strike such a pious sense as that of the judicious Hooker, for example. In much the same way, probably, that it does the æstheticians and economists themselves—namely, as an arrogant and irresponsible mixing of genres in defiance of innate decorum.

IV

His writing on art, at all events, his didacticism distorts in the first place, and vitiates in the second. It distorts it by giving it the false sanction of moral purpose, of utility. In a large sense, as I have said, art certainly has this sanction, and no other, like every

department of human effort. In the only sense, however, in which this is not a truism, it is false; and a detailed consideration of art in this view results in distortion. It is nothing against the "Perseus" of Florence that Benvenuto was a rascal; it is nothing in favor of the absurd embryonic sculpture on St. Mark's that the artisan was a reverent and pious worker belonging to the "ages of faith." Purely emotional treatment of fine art is vitiated treatment, because it upsets all real distinctions and all relative values. Frequent examples of this in Ruskin recur to one's memory. In fact, it is to be said in all soberness that they make up the body of his art writing outside of its rhapsody. Complete surrender to emotion, which is, of course, the source of whim and fanaticism, has resulted, in Mr. Ruskin's case, in a body of criticism most of which is never seen by competent critics without either exasperation or disdain. It never sings the praises of restraint, of severity, of the Greek element in art. It loses the form in the significance, and the significance it as often as not supplies itself. It not only exalts sentiment in altogether undue degree, and depreciates pure expression, but the sentiment which unfailingly it admires is sentiment of a particularly primitive nature. It becomes ecstatic to puerility over a crude Giotto forgery in Santa Maria Novella, for example (*vide* "Mornings in Florence"), and is unmoved by the ineffable spirituality of Raphael's inexhaustible expression. It shows the delight of a savage

in the presence of the positive colors simply combined, and remains cold before subtle harmonies of value. It extols "the precision and perfection of the instantaneous line" as the acme of painting, and finds Titian's "Presentation" a cheap composition.

The truth is, he was quite disoriented in writing about art at all. He neither recognized its limitations, nor acquiesced in its office, nor apprehended its distinction. He did not *like* it. He was, which is quite another thing, in love with nature. All the art he cared for was what is sometimes called imitative art, and his measure of this was the amount of unadulterated nature it contained. For constructive and composed beauty he had no feeling. He thought it blasphemous. He shrank instinctively from everything architectonic. Art, in the sense of nature plus the artist's alembic, absolutely disquieted and perturbed him. He had his own alembic — and certainly one whose magic is its own justification often. But what an equipment for a writer — either philosophic or even poetic — on art! Art has its own sanctions, its own gospel, its own devotees. Mr. Ruskin was of the opposite creed — one may say, in the opposite camp. A bit of botany in a painter's work was more to him than the loveliest generalization. Partly his contention was the moral one that it showed more reverence, more fidelity, more humility. Let whoever will define these terms, which in this sense, at all events, are already obsolescent, even in English writing upon art. Their illogicality is

apparent. The cathedral is as apt a place as a cave to worship in, and God is doubtless as immanent in the work of man as in inanimate nature. Reduced to its lowest terms — and to absurdity — Ruskin's contention would be that the soul is not His habitation. But the only way to absolve him from the charge of the loosest kind of thinking in his lucubrations on art is, avoiding confutation of his logic, to concentrate one's attention on his adoration of nature.

Here, however, he was beyond all cavil superb. Has ever any one else done what he has here? One is almost tempted into dithyramb in speaking of the way in which he has verbally crystallized his appreciations of the myriad aspects of that immense and immensely attractive energy of which, if Wordsworth is to be called the poet, Ruskin himself is surely the oracle. He characterizes Wordsworth, somewhere, in his ludicrously patronizing way, as in his best period "simply a Westmoreland peasant with the gift of melody." It is an absurd description of Wordsworth, but, *mutatis mutandis*, it might do for Ruskin — one might say, if inspired by an analogous whimsicality. He lacked constitutionally, it is true, the simplicity of the peasant. He had not even the Tennysonian substitute of *simplesse* — to recall Arnold's happy distinction. No great writer was ever so perversely complicated. But in his view of nature, his absolute worship of her, he was more than simple, he was naïve. And his readers reap the benefit of this attitude in a long succession of lofty

and noble and moving and intimate disquisitions which not only elevate and charm but inform and instruct. He declares her mysteries with prophet-like authority, and seduces us into her arcanum with the most winning persuasions. None of her aspects escapes his affectionately prolonged penetrative gaze, and he synthetizes them with an art that seems even to transcend the observation on which it is based. His one distinction is to have been the most attentive, the most affectionate, the most eloquent, the most persuasive apostle of nature. But surely his preoccupation with art must be admitted to be perversity, and in his treatment of it any one who has as much delight in beauty as Ruskin had, and who therefore needs no emotional stimulus, will find the same lack of substance as he who already believes in mediæval virtues will in his more specific "criticism of life."

V

Arnold somewhere relates that he once remarked to Sainte-Beuve that he could not consider Lamartine a poet of much importance, and that Sainte-Beuve replied: "He was important to *us*." Ruskin's real importance is of a similarly relative kind. He undoubtedly earned the reward of the evangelist, however little to do with any estimate of his work as literature such a distinction may have. He gave an immense impetus in his own country and among ourselves to the popular interest in the whole subject of fine art. He raised its standard and

beat the drum and clashed the cymbals about it with a vigor, a vehemence and a persistency that won thousands of recruits from the ranks of the philistines.

In the first place, he discovered in it a great deal of neglected beauty. His study of its "original documents" was, if not always profound, prodigiously prolonged in many cases, as an ample fortune and complete leisure permitted. He was quite unhampered, often to the point of being uninstructed, by the consensus of other writing on the subject. To archæologists he is occasionally as much of a sciolist as he is to political economists, though to the general laic appreciation his erudition seems a main element of his equipment. "Every one is not bound to know in what Gothic construction consists," said a pupil of Courajod to me once, speaking of Ruskin, "but I think a professor should." But he brought to the monuments and pictures that inspired him a fresh eye and a strenuous and individual temperament. For many people he practically discovered the *primitifs*, and by merely imagining himself — often no doubt quite erroneously — at their point of view, said many truly and searchingly interpretative things about them out of sheer force of sympathy. About Giotto, for a conspicuous example. The very predominance of the emotional over the intellectual side in him led him to feel the sentiment so inadequately expressed in technical respects. His temperamental depreciation of Ghirlandajo's manifest merit, for example, exactly prepares him for perceiving the feeling

inherent in many an awkward, incompetent and unbeautiful piece of workmanship. Of course in many cases he had to praise the workmanship, too. But meantime he had drawn attention to his favorites and got them at least considered. By dint merely of discovering "the most beautiful picture in the world" here and there, now the Bellini of the Frari, now the Carpaccio in the Museo Correr, as his preference changed, he stimulated popular interest in the less notable, but in a sense hardly more negligible, of the masters of painting. And similarly with a bit of mosaic in a certain church pavement, or a certain capital of a well-known palace, or a certain little figure of a cathedral façade, and so on. In this way he led his readers to appreciate the wealth of historic art production as under more conventional, less fanciful, guidance they would have — indeed, had theretofore under such guidance — failed to do.

In the second place, the generalizing character of his writing on art popularized the subject. He *had* a philosophy of it, bizarre as this might be. He talked infinitely about its principles, such as he curiously conceived them. There is an idea — or at least a notion, a crotchet — in all his utterances. His descriptions even are largely illustrative. Whatever he says has significance in the sense of dealing with meaning rather than exclusively with aspect. It is at least a text from which to preach and not left merely to itself. From the outset all his writing on art is full of "views," and

to a large number of readers "views" are particularly interesting. Those of which he was so prodigal were, moreover, by no means exclusively on art, but on all sorts of more or less allied topics also. All of them had a strong ethical tinge, which was in itself a popular recommendation of the strongest kind. If this is what art is, many must have reflected, it is something serious after all, something really worth while. And very often they had the additional attractiveness of more or less novelty either in themselves or in their presentation. The chapter-titles alone of "Modern Painters" are eloquent witness of his disposition to take his subject on large general lines, just as the mere nomenclature of his "seven lamps" announced a novel kind of ideal synthesis of architecture, however fanciful it might be. He was, in fact, captivatingly synthetic. All æsthetic phenomena of which he treated — and the detail of them is prodigious in number and multifariousness — grouped themselves readily in serried support of some central and unifying idea, some co-ordinating thesis, and took on the orderly aspect of an organism. There is an air of great system and explicit correlation in everything he wrote on art, and nothing better prepares the way for the reception of anything like a body of doctrine.

VI

Matching and supplementing the service rendered by Ruskin's writing on art to the Anglo-Saxon public

in general is that rendered by it to art itself — meaning mainly English painting. It certainly cannot be said that his writing on art drew the attention of English painters to nature. The sub-title of "Modern Painters" itself was, in the first edition, "Their Superiority in the Art of Landscape-painting to the Ancient Masters" — not only the superiority of Turner *imprimis*, but of many other English painters. But he did more than attract general attention to this contention. In doing this he also appreciably determined the course of English painting. Under his influence landscape-painting greatly increased, and for a time, at least, it largely followed the lines he laid down for it. Captivated by his apotheosis of nature, English painting to a considerable extent forswore its particular conventionalities and practised the precepts he preached. How much or how little he is to be credited — or charged — with the origination of pre-Raphaelitism as practised by the prominent elders of the sect has been much discussed, but it is unimportant beside the fact that he preached their gospel from the first, won them professional adherents, and greatly extended their influence and vogue. He furnished them with a philosophy, with followers and with a public. And the decline and disappearance of the cult does not obscure the fact that the predominance of the "note" of nature in English art ever since Ruskin began his ministry is largely due to his eloquent insistence on it as the one thing needful for artistic salvation. The extreme literalness, flatness, and pov-

erty as art of much English painting until long after Ruskin had turned his attention to other things, shows how influential was his gospel in freeing the average practitioner from the trammels and temptations of artistic conventionality and steeping him in a conventionality of its own — the conventionality of naturalistic imitation. But one may suspect that English art, as art, owes him more gratitude than resentment for determining its course in a direction which, however little it shines in it, is more consonant with its native aptitudes than are the artificialities from which he did much to rescue it. If its nature-worship under his tuition shows more in the transliteration, as one may say, than the translation of nature, it is at least an expression of a genuine and not an acquired bent.

VII

As to the lack of form in Ruskin's style, there is likely to be far more dispute. Let it be said at once that his style is wonderfully eloquent. It has, moreover, one specific quality that mainly distinguishes it from the prose of any other writer: it has a peculiar beauty of cadence. It is true that its cadence is the element in it that most strongly suggests to a nice sense its falling short of the music of metre. And of course he abused it. Like his other qualities, it led directly and irresistibly to its corresponding defect. He took no artistic pleasure in its guidance and con-

trol, but delivered himself up to it with his usual luxurious self-surrender. Yet it is the element of his prose which is not only most nearly unique, but also most serviceable to him. It sustains and gives character to his periods, many of which run into passages too prolonged for the breath of even his most devoted admirers. In his hands it is beautifully differentiated. The cadence of Gibbon, of De Quincey, even of Jeremy Taylor, is a simple affair beside Ruskin's, which in comparison possesses an infinite variety of notes and chords. It gives him a title to real greatness as a technician. It carries his excesses of assonance and alliteration—excesses which in his earlier writings he contemptuously stigmatizes, in his later, however, naturally recurring to them again. It is the native and spontaneous factor that purifies his "fine writing" and qualifies its artificiality. Through his cadence you feel that his meretriciousness has a kind of nodal substructure of natural and genuine felicity. Take, for example, the following "purple patch" from one of his later deliverances. He is speaking of the dove, apropos of vivisection:

> And of these wings and this mind of hers this is what reverent science [one feels like interpolating "sic"] should teach you. First, with what parting of plume and what soft pressure and rhythmic beating of divided air she reaches that miraculous swiftness of undubious motion, compared with which the tempest is slow and the arrow uncer-

tain; and, secondly, what clew there is, visible or conceivable to thought of man, by which to her living conscience and errorless pointing of magnetic soul her distant home is felt far beyond the horizon, and the straight path, through concealing clouds and over trackless lands, made plain to her desire and her duty by the finger of God.

This, I think, is Ruskin's prose at its best, and there is a great deal of substantially its quality in his writings. Its liquid recurrent cadences are varied and accumulated with the nicest instinctive art. It is not, to be sure, quite in the classic key. Horace, who objected to the *purpureus pannus* even in poetry, we may be certain would not have greatly cared for it. If read aloud it beguiles the voice into a kind of chant and so is likely to please most the ear most easily satisfied with a substitute when song is suggested. And therefore, since it is not quite "the real thing," the effect of it in the profusion in which we encounter it in Ruskin's writings is the effect of surfeit. It makes excellent selections for the declamation of youth, and it has given many, many mature readers the greatest pleasure, and, since enjoying it evokes no energy, pleasure of a slightly oriental order. In a sense, indeed, it might be called voluptuous prose, were it not so often the garb of sentiments whose moral nature renders it elevated as well as eloquent. And mainly its intoxicating quality lies in its characteristic cadences, which, as I say, no other writer has ever equalled.

And at times it carries one away with it; you forget any notions you may have about the essential characteristics of prose, or recall them only to feel yourself a pedant. It is when he is speaking of nature especially that this is true, as I have already implied — when "the waves of everlasting green roll silently into their long inlets under the shadows of the pines." You doubt if Wordsworth's poetry has surpassed such expression of the power of nature over the emotions. But its first effect past, the old notions about prose recur, as they do after reading Jeremy Taylor or Elizabethan prose. You feel that there is something lacking, some element tending to repose, to sanity. Such a force as is applied by the reserve of poetic form, reducing to calmer movement and severer outline the tumultuous cadences in which Mr. Ruskin's emotional genius riots, would be of advantage, perhaps, even in such a splendid passage as that whose closing lines I last quoted. Even outbursts of impassioned eloquence, when they merely or mainly express emotion, gain in elevation and permanent charm through the element of artistic restraint. But there is no room for doubt that the positive need of this is illustrated by the mass of Ruskin's rhapsodical writing. His exuberance is very often absolutely savage and meaningless. It is pure feeling exhaled in the worst possible taste. Take, among a multitude of examples, the once admired passage describing the piazza and church of St. Mark. It is perfectly unscrupulous in its rhetorical devices, and

thoroughly puerile in its cheap tropicality. Ruskin would infallibly and correctly describe such a passage in another writer as "cockney." It is because his great defect is excess of emotion, and because emotion in one way or another is nearly his only source of strength, and because poetical form is almost sure to counteract excess, that English literature has perhaps lost from Ruskin's exclusive devotion to prose. To the preponderance of his emotional over his intellectual side, at all events, are justly attributable the two great defects which imperil his position as an English classic, namely, the lack of substance in his matter and the lack of form in his style.

GEORGE MEREDITH

GEORGE MEREDITH

I

THERE are many traces in Mr. Meredith's novels of his sensitiveness to the popular neglect of them. There is no doubt of the neglect hitherto, though there are signs just at present of his increasing vogue. And he, at least, is too large-minded a writer to be consoled for the indifference of the many by the devotion of a few. When one considers not merely the very considerable bulk of his contribution to fiction, but its extraordinary range and variety, and the absence in it anywhere of the element of preciosity or other littleness of the kind, the adhesion of "the elect" must seem a derisory mitigation of the sense of having missed the interest of the general.

But such originality as his — originality at any price — is to be achieved only at the cost of isolation. Note also that one instinctively speaks of it as an achievement rather than a native endowment. Were it altogether the gift of mother nature, its evolution could be traced and its relationships established. As it is, it has no genealogy. No writer ever pursued particularity so far; with the result that he stands

quite apart from and unsupported by the literary fellowship which is a powerful agent in commending any writer to the attention of either the studious or the desultory. He cannot be placed. He has no derivation and no tendency. His works inhere in no larger category. He gains nothing from ancestry or association. He fills no *lacunæ*, supplements no incompleteness, supplants no predecessor. He is so wholly *sui generis* that neglect of him involves neglect of nothing else, implies no deficiency of taste, no literary limitedness. Failure to appreciate him is no impeachment of one's catholicity. If he has a philosophy he is too original to let it be perceived; if he has even a point of view he is too original to preserve it long enough for the reader to catch. The whole current of the literature of his day has flowed by him without apparently awakening any impulse on his part to stem or accelerate it, without even attracting from him more than the interested glance of the spectator. His eminence is thus so extremely lonely as to tempt the profane — whom he tempts a good deal — to wonder if it be not his loneliness that constitutes his eminence. His complaints of his lack of popularity seem to ignore this essential aloofness, which extends even to the absence of any media of communication. So true is it that he makes no effort to win readers by providing even an atmosphere to be breathed in common for the time being, that it is a part of his persistent originality expressly to avoid this. To the sincere dilettante spirit,

to do otherwise would perhaps seem a concession, a kind of solicitation, open to suspicion of tincture with vulgarity. Results follow causes, however, here as elsewhere, and if Mr. Meredith has been so explicitly to take or to leave, it is not so very surprising that he has been so largely left.

Few of those he has won have a very definite account to give of the reasons for their adhesion. Hardly any of them have been at the pains to set these forth, at all events. From which one may legitimately infer, I think, that their enthusiasm is largely constitutional rather than rational. They are, perhaps, constitutionally drawn to originality as such and for its own sake. They exhibit the interest of the active-minded in phenomena that appeal less acutely to the distinctively educated. To the mass of representatively educated readers, Mr. Meredith's originality is disturbing. They are already interested in the things of the mind; they are familiar enough with the riches of the classics to have in mind models that admeasure rather summarily wilful departure from them; they are distrustful of the eccentric and inhospitable to novelty that controverts established canons. They care so much for literature as to care much less for anything so little like it. There is no conservatism more inveterate than the conservatism of education; none has more excuse for confirmation in the emptiness of the radicalism which continually confronts and opposes it; and none has so clear and so confident a repose in its own standards.

Since the works of Mr. Meredith are so entirely *sui generis* as to constitute a class by themselves in contradistinction and even antagonism to not some but all of the masterpieces they admire, and since moreover these works are difficult to read, educated conservatism is often disposed to trust to the *pari de Pascal* and take its chances. A good deal remains, after all, even if one loses something, is no doubt its reflection.

On the other hand, the active-minded, who are traditionally unfettered, and in no wise disconcerted by contravention of the classic, instinctively welcome what no tyrannical standard bids them exclude. Not that they and the object of their worship in this case are sympathetically or even similarly constituted. Mr. Meredith is the incarnation of culture. He is educated to the point of extreme refinement. As Thackeray said of Macaulay, "he reads twenty books to write a sentence; he travels a hundred miles to make one line of description." But the attraction of the candle of culture for the moth of irresponsible mental activity is a familiar phenomenon. And in Mr. Meredith's works, whatever the business in hand or however wretchedly it is proceeding, this luminary is always alight. Penetrating remarks about life, searching observations on human character, proverbs, epigrams, aphorisms, saws, shine brilliantly or sputter, as the case may be, continually in its beams. The evidence that he knows what he is talking about is prodigiously voluminous. The circumstance that what he is talking

about if large lacks concreteness and if small lacks relations, that in saying a number of specific things about things in general he is stimulating the appreciative faculties rather than providing an object for their satisfaction, is less material. The less coherent and constructive culture is, the more clearly it appears as culture, as an end in itself rather than as a means to any end — such as the manufacture of masterpieces, for example. For a similar reason there is also to be found among Mr. Meredith's admirers that element of the literary class which particularly savors technic as technic; and his extreme cleverness, his variety and deftness of manipulation, so to speak, must be what wins for him the applause of such technicians as Mr. Henry James and Mr. Stevenson, though when Mr. Stevenson called him Shakespearian, he must have had his active imagination also in mind. And there are doubtless many readers who "care more for thought than for art," as the preference has been expressed, and who share with such literary artificers as Mr. James and Mr. Stevenson a fondness for the raw material of art, provided it be of high quality, without pedantically demanding that too much be done with it.

Neither the neglect nor the enthusiasm of which he is the object, however, helps to characterize Mr. Meredith's genius, save indirectly, and I have only referred to them in the endeavor to explain that they are natural and should not be suffered to prejudge his case. He is too large a figure to be obscured even by his own

"originality," on the one hand, or, on the other, to be belittled by the extravagant admiration of "the elect." He has written many novels and not one that does not furnish brilliant evidence of remarkable powers. His poetry is a secondary affair altogether, whatever its value, and it is as a novelist that he ranks in the literature of his time. And as a novelist it may be claimed and must be conceded that his position is not only unique, as I have said, but of very notable eminence. What other writer deserves to rank with Thackeray and George Eliot in the foremost files of Victorian fiction? — I do not mean for extraordinary genius, like Dickens's, or for dramatic psychology, such as Mr. Hardy's, but for his "criticism of life."

II

THE defect one feels most sensibly in Mr. Meredith's organization is his lack of temperament. It is this that extracts the savor from his originality. He has, if one chooses, the temperament of the dilettante. But the characteristic of the dilettante really is absence of temperament. Like its far less frequent but also far less indispensable analogue, genius, temperament is much more easily felt than defined. It is approximately to be described, however, as individuality of disposition quite apart from intellectual constitution, which nevertheless it influences, directs and at times even coerces. It is of the essence of the personal nature, of which the merely

intellectual expression is, in comparison, an attribute. It supplies not only the color but the energy of any personal point of view or way of looking at things. It is the incalculable element in the human composition, the force through which the others fuse. It is through temperament that character organizes its traits into a central and coherent efficiency. Temperament, in a word, is energy accentuating personality. Original — and indubitable — as Mr. Meredith's genius is, his personality is precisely what we never feel in it. It is not at all that he is what used to be called "objective" — that, like Shakespeare, he does not "abide our question." It is that he fails to excite it. He is detached, evasive, elusive, but he stimulates no curiosity. One may speculate, it is true, though without zeal, as to the reason of his own interest in many of the phenomena that his books present. This interest is not only inferably but obviously very great, and it strikes one as singular considering his monopoly of it on many occasions — for I suppose even the so-called Meredithian must fail to share it much of the time, however he may overdo the business as a rule. The answer is that it is the interest of the dilettante, too much absorbed in phenomena to think of himself contributing anything to their recombination in accordance with his own vision or volition — at most occupied with attributions and exposition.

The dilettante is, it need hardly be said, an independent rather than an inferior type. Distinction is so marked and constant a quality of Mr. Meredith that

to ascribe inferiority of any kind to him would be ludicrous — except in so far as, for example, his particular order of critical implies an inferiority of constructive talent. He is the ideal dilettante in virtue of the completeness and the catholicity of his devotion to the delectable. He finds it everywhere — everywhere, that is to say, where it exists in intellectual combination. And this, I think, gives him his extraordinary relief against his English environment, in which his temper and interests are rarely to be encountered. He has inexhaustible curiosity. What he calls "the human mechanism" attracts him distinctly as a mechanism. Within certain limits he explores its intricacies with wonderful ardor. He treats an eccentric type a little as if it were a new toy. The figure might be pushed still further: when he gets through with investigating it, it does not go quite as well as before he took it so completely to pieces. His analytic impulse is altogether out of proportion to his architectonic capacity. He is a critic dealing with the material of the artist.

His books are curiously alike in interest, worth and meaning. And this singular equivalence testifies strongly to an equipoise undisturbed by anything so variable as temperament. Each has its thesis, and in its statement and demonstration the author evinces very nearly the same zest inspired by its fellows — that is to say, an intellectual interest in the working out of the thesis *qua* thesis. "Beauchamp's Career" is rather an exception. But this is because here his artistic thesis

happens to include the setting forth of a general social and political one, in which he comes as near to taking a truly temperamental interest — to showing, I mean to say, a real personal feeling — as his systematic detachment ever permits. In "Beauchamp's Career" he does seem to betray a certain sympathy for man as man, for the democratic ideal. It is allowed to be divined and is quite objectively expressed in the main, through characters whose enthusiasm is impartially exhibited as excessive, and whose periods are pruned by corresponding Phocions of the opposite tendency. In ideal dilettante fashion the author, like victory, hovers over the combatants without alighting in either camp. The space he gives to the controversy and a shade of fervor in the statement of the "popular" side are the main evidences of his partiality. In "Evan Harrington" the scales are held with a blinder exactness on a truer level. Its theme — "Can a tailor be a gentleman?" — is exquisitely adapted to the dilettante genius. It might seem insipid but for the fact that it is English and therefore has tragic potentialities. Mr. Meredith gets a great deal out of it. Doing, I think, full justice to its gravity, he nevertheless finds its development full of zest. It gives edge to his satire, in which he is an adept, never being betrayed into the acerbity foreign to the true dilettante. It stimulates his sportiveness into the highest kind of high spirits a critic and a philosopher may properly indulge. And at times — as in the absurd public house scene between the absurd Cogglesby

brothers — it declines into absurd farce without in the least losing its interest for him.

Note that his detachment is not that of the artist. It is a detachment of spirit, not objectivity in treatment. He is often enough on the stage himself. His observations *in propria persona* are constant. He is never absorbed either in his subject or in its delineation. On the contrary, he keeps it at arm's length when he is most interested in it, and speculates copiously about it. He gives the reader his impression of it—often pungent, generally prolix. His tongue submits to no objective restraint in uttering the thoughts that arise in him regarding it. If these thoughts were sufficiently charged with feeling he would appear as a moralist or a sentimentalist, but as they have no particular temperamental alloy, no purpose, it is less obvious that his attitude is not artistically, but only emotionally, detached. We are accustomed, in other words, to the artist whose presentation of his subject is supplemented by his personal commentary, but not to him whose commentary though constant is thoroughly impersonal. The latter is the case with Mr. Meredith; and it constitutes no small part of his originality that even his essential aloofness should be no help to him in the artistic presentation of his subject unconfused with talk about it.

The artistic inappositeness of his commentary, on the other hand, is not relieved by personal feeling; it has no heart in it; it wearies as prolonged intel-

lectual activity unmodified by feeling alone can weary. He turns his subject round and exhibits it as a collector does an interesting possession — a bit of cloisonné or a figurine. Except that he does so in large fashion, without pettiness or partisanship or other limitation, and that his "specimens" have indubitable significance, the parallel would be perfect. But in his large and penetrating way he lectures at great length on his finds. "The Egoist," for example, is essentially a dissertation — full of variety, it is true, and, truly, as its subtitle declares, "a comedy in narrative" as to form, but substantially not inaptly described as a dissertation. He even digresses whenever an allied topic solicits him. Nor need the alliance be a close one. The chapter on wine in "The Egoist" and that on ale in "Evan Harrington" are complete digressions — the former, especially, a remarkable *tour de force*, but both clearly the exuberance of the connoisseur and in no wise details of an artistic composition. In an artist they would be effrontery. As it is they are excellent instances of the exercise of his prerogative by a dilettante in whose large and catholic and rather Olympian attitude towards art one cannot help fancying a slight tincture of disdain.

III

Mr. Meredith's world, however, is not a real world. It is a fantastic one treated realistically. It is not simple enough to be real; *he* is not simple enough. It

is so little representative that it lacks illusion. Any one who should base upon it his notion of the world of English society—society in the large sense, I mean—would get not only an incomplete but a distorted idea, though Mr. Meredith's world is as multifarious as it is populous. It is, like his genius, thoroughly *sui generis*, and it is peopled for the most part with figures of which the large or piquant conception is far more definite than the realization. Dickens's world, too, is *sui generis*. But it is everywhere intensely real and definite. You recall his characters vividly often without remembering in which books they occur. In the case of Mr. Meredith, you recall the books, not the characters. You never warm to his personages. You are not allowed to. He banters you out of it generally; even when such favorites of his own as Nevil Beauchamp are concerned, he is almost nervously timorous lest your tenderness should be unintelligent. This is carried so far that one rarely cares much what becomes of these personages. You know in advance that they will never be the sport of any spontaneity. Their fate is sealed. They are the slaves of their creator's will, counters in his game. And this is why, in playing it, though he constantly challenges our admiration, he does not hold our interest. The air of free agency that he throws around them does not deceive us. We don't at all know what is to befall them, how they are going to act, but we have an ever-present sense that he does, and this sense is only

sharpened by the knowledge, born of experience in reading his books, that he is going to make them surprise us. The induction he would have us make is, no doubt, that they are unaccountable, like human nature itself; but the one we make is that it is he who is unaccountable.

There is one characteristic of his people that is given great relief. They are in general conceived and presented from the standpoint of what their creator is fond of calling "brain-stuff." But "brain-stuff" is easier to predicate than to portray. Every reader of "Diana of the Crossways" must have remarked that the heroine is declared to be of an intellectual brilliancy that is inadequately illustrated by her own manifestations of the quality. Furthermore, "brain-stuff" is much more useful to rank people than to distinguish them. Brains as a trait are rather an anomaly. One person has more or less than another, but a markedly different order of them means eccentricity, or is at least apt to seem so in depiction. As to their *natures*, men are what they are through their feeling, not their thinking, except in so far as their thinking influences their feeling. And their feeling is much more satisfactorily described directly than at one remove.

This is one reason why many of Mr. Meredith's characters have the prime defect of not being always *in* character. He does not keep his eye on them. They do not command his undivided attention. Engrossed in their "brain-stuff," he has conceived them

vividly, but he is not intimate enough with *them*, not subconsciously mindful enough of their identity. This is at least true of the leading personages who help him to pose and develop his theme, of which, on the other hand, he is unremittingly mindful. They are the theme's illustrations, and vary with the exigencies of its sinuous evolution out of the line of personal consistency. One feels that they are not the point. It is not merely that they are not differentiated in diction—that they all talk Meredith—except here and there minor characters that sometimes make one wish they did. This is true, and it is a great and obvious cause of the weakening of their individual definition, which is always greater at the outset than further along. The characters of many other authors, however, talk alike, too. The circumstance is a convention, a concession to the necessity of exhibiting undramatically certain traits too delicate, too elusive, for literally characteristic vocabularies and habits of expression. Logic would often require dialect, which is mainly intolerable. Compromise is imperative in any art, and one need not insist upon such vital characterizations in mere diction as Browning's, for example, which triumph so splendidly even over the inevitable blending of rhythm. But take such a notable instance as Mr. James, whose characters are often reproached with talking James. The reproach, whether grave or trivial, is often just, but the main point is that they talk their own sentiments. Those of Mr. Meredith often do not.

They are his mouthpieces; they say what he wishes said. The Princess Ottilia, for instance, in "Harry Richmond," is a charming creature, originally conceived and for a considerable period consistently carried out. Yet, wishing to make a series of observations about "life and the world," such as, "The world has accurate eyes but they are not very penetrating," he puts the shrewd reflections of philosophic maturity into the mouth of a young girl. Such instances abound in his novels.

Naturally, furthermore, his psychology is a prominent constituent of his characterizations, but curiously enough it operates, at least as often as not, in the direction of dissipating rather than defining their individuality. It is, in fact, nearly always a psychology of types, not of individuals. The contrary is, of course, usually the case with the psychological novelist, whose *raison d'être* may almost be said to be that for him types are conventions and therefore to be eschewed and replaced by individuals whose differentiation is psychologically achieved. Particularity of mental structure is his reliance for realistic illusion in his characters, as individuals contradistinguished from types. It would be paradoxical to assert that Mr. Meredith's characters are conventional. In the ordinary sense the epithet seems the one above all others which least fits his genius in any phase of its expression. But though to the last degree unconventionally handled, and exhibited with a freedom that is

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license, an originality that is whimsical, they are nevertheless treated as types. They are simply unconventional types—types either conceived by his wonderfully fertile fancy, such as Harry Richmond's father, or generalized through his extraordinary penetration, such as Sir Willoughby Patterne. Yet, in spite of the wealth of psychological analysis that is expended on them, they are as representative, as illustrative, as typical, in a word, as if his aversion to the traditional had not dictated their eccentricity. They acquire their high degree — their high dilution, one may almost say — of complication through being types of his manufacture; for it is to be noted that they are not typical in virtue of correspondence to any natural analogue. They are in each case a conceivable congeries of characteristics combined into ideal types by the genius of the philosophic critic.

The result is that the illusion disappears — the character does not reach realization. It disintegrates into desultoriness. I do not myself recall a single character in Mr. Meredith's populous world that does not lose in definition in his portrayal of its complexity. It is not merely because he has the idea instead of the image of it. That, to be sure, counts very largely. His absurd Countess in "Evan Harrington" may stand, in idea, as an analogue of Thackeray's Rebecca, whose memorable career was run before "psychology" was thought of as a necessary element of fiction. As an image the Countess is not visualized at all. But her

definition is not only imperfect to begin with. The idea altogether eclipses the incarnation of it in the treatment she receives as well as in the author's conception of her. She is so much talked about by her creator, and her own conduct and talk and letters are so expressly calculated — so consecrated, indeed — to the exhibition of her character, her character is so explicitly and unremittingly presented to our contemplation — we are so constantly and often so subtly reminded that she is not all bad, for example — that instead of seeming a real person she seems an idea generalized. She is a character psychologized into a type, instead of a type individualized by psychology.

George Eliot's genius for generalization is, considering its scope and its seriousness, certainly not inferior to Mr. Meredith's, but she is mistress of it, and though it limits the elasticity of her characters, it is never allowed to dilute their individuality. On the contrary, it intensifies it. Tito illustrates an idea as completely, as exclusively, as Mr. Meredith's Egoist does, for example; but he incarnates it also. You get so much of the idea that you would be perhaps glad of a diversion, but it is because Tito himself is so interpenetrated with it that it is an idea active, moving and alive. Patterne is in comparison a symbol. Setting aside the fact that the whole question is begged by describing him as vastly more winning than he is shown to be, half his psychology is commentary, and before long the reader is admiring the penetration of the author into human character in gen-

eral, his detection of egoism under its multifarious disguises, the justice he renders the quality even in exposing it, and so on. Tito, on the other hand, has the actual, almost palpable force of the traditional "awful example." As for Maggie Tulliver or any of George Eliot's notablest successes, none of Meredith's are at all in the same class with them any more than they are with Thackeray's. His discursiveness and his kind of discursiveness are fatal obstacles. Whatever may be said of the art of Thackeray's moralizing or of George Eliot's philosophizing, neither is discursive in the sense of diminishing the vitality of the characterizations it accompanies. Each serves the not unimportant purpose of enforcing the significance of the characters and situations. But when psychology in fiction ceases to particularize it becomes a pure excursus. It has its interest, no doubt, and indirectly may increase the typical quality of a character by showing how much it is like other characters. But even in this indirect way it manifestly loses rather than gains definition. With Mr. Meredith a character is, in this respect, often a mere point of departure.

Each book is the elaboration of an idea, the working out of some theme taken on its intellectual side. Sometimes this is very specific, as in "Diana" or "Feverel," but it is always perfectly defined. The book is a series of deductions from it. Its essential unity therefore — spite of excrescent detail — is agreeably unmistakable. But it is hardly necessary to

point out that it is not the unity of a sympathetic image of life immediately beholden in its entirety. It is a mathematical, that is to say an artificial, unity. The plot, the personages, are not elements of an *ensemble* but proofs of a demonstration. And human life being for artistic purposes very little a matter of abstractions, being, in fact, uncontrollably concrete, it follows from this that his demonstration is in constant danger of being a pure *tour de force*. In effect Mr. Meredith's novels are primarily *tours de force*. At least, if some of them, such as "Beauchamp's Career," partially escape this danger, the most characteristic ones do not. To escape it requires too much cleverness, more even than Mr. Meredith possesses. Incidentally it may be circumvented, and incidentally he is successful — notably in minor characters and situations. Some of his minor characters are not only delightful, but sound to the core — Sir Lukin Dunstane, Lady Eglett, the pious sea-captain in "Harry Richmond," a dozen others, of which, however, candor compels the admission that they are the least original, altogether the most nearly conventional, of his creations. Some of his situations are extremely vital and truthful — the swimming scene in "Lord Ormont," the statue impersonation by Harry Richmond's father, which is immensely comic, even grandiose — though as a rule they are either incidental, or at most mechanically contributory to the plot. The scene in "Harry Richmond," which is the crux of the story, is, in spite of the splendid philippic of the Squire,

a failure. The heroic mountebank breaks down completely, "goes to pieces" not only in "nerve" but as a character of fiction. It may be said that thereby his human quality, underlying and excusing his extravagance, is shown. But a character that has first been inflated into fantasticality as a *tour de force* is not built up into convincingness by collapse into credibility. It is simply destroyed. The hollowness of the original conception is lamentably evident in the retrospect. The circumstance is typical and illustrates the failure in illusion of Mr. Meredith's art, due to the antagonism between his material and his purpose — the unfitness, in other words, of the data of human life to serve the purpose of theoretic demonstration. In this instance it is the effect of his *tour de force* that is sacrificed. Far more frequently and much more seriously the convincingness of his picture of life is vitiated by a twisting of its elements into supports for his thesis. In general he achieves the aim of the *tour de force*. He attains plausibility. Everything is carefully thought out from the beginning. Details of no interest in themselves prove to have a bearing on the plot; characters of no substance prove necessary pieces of the mosaic. Things incredible take place in order to make other things seem natural. One feels combining purpose everywhere. Your doubts are foreseen, your objections forestalled. You are discomfited, not persuaded. And there is eminent, crying need of persuasion. The general effect is positively that of argumentation.

IV

THERE is one element of Mr. Meredith's originality that in no wise eludes analysis, and that is his perversity. It is omnipresent in his writings and always conspicuous. It is so intense that were his calm less Olympian, his self-possession less complacent, it would seem distinctly neuropathic. It is, however, a completely integral characteristic, native to the constitution of his mind, and never, I think, due to, or alloyed with, affectation or attitudinizing of any kind. His genius is quite free from pose. It is notable for a certain largeness and independence quite incompatible with the approbativeness implied in affectation. His perversity is a natural bent toward the artificial. Its delight is in disappointing the reader's normal expectations. Simplicity is its detestation. If the idea is simple, its statement is complicated. If it is particularly subtile, its expression is correspondingly succinct. A character, if unusual, receives a commonplace treatment, and if commonplace itself, is assigned some extravagance. If an incident is trivial, it is magnified into importance with a remarkable ingenuity or given an extraordinary satiric relief; if it is truly dramatic, it is distinctly minimized. The author has apparently a definite dread of climaxes, which would seem instinctive if he were not here as elsewhere perfectly theoretic. His perversity is deliberately indulged, doubtless with some theory emulative and exaggerative of antique prac-

tice, and modified into modernness by reflection on the undramatic unfolding of the real tragedies of life.

The complexity of human nature, always a theme of the true novelist, is exhibited by Mr. Meredith with characteristic originality. You are shown the complexity, but so artificially that it ceases to be convincing. Such a character as Diana Warwick, for example, the favorite probably of most Meredithians, is the result of an ambitious and elaborate attempt to create an embodiment of warring impulses, contradictory qualities, in picturesque but vital consistency—a character, at least, whose definite personality successfully dominates its inconsistencies. It is a successful attempt only, I should fancy, to the sense of readers who forget a portion of the data in their vivid recollection of the rest. When Diana commits her extravagant offence, she really ceases to exist. Her personality is dissipated; she becomes another individual. Any debate as to whether she would have been likely to do such a thing is not even academic. It is merely inquiring whether one kind of a person is likely to do something characteristic of a wholly different person. This may conceivably happen in life, but it is not characteristic of life, and therefore in art it has only the interest of a paradox, its representation being fatal to the integrity of the thing represented. The complexity of human nature is not what is shown. What is shown is the cleverness of the artist in shoring up into plausibility something inherently incredible.

The most noteworthy example of this perversity is his one great tragedy, "The Ordeal of Richard Feverel," his first and, in the view of his most thoroughgoing admirers, his greatest book. It is a marvel of artificiality imposed upon the reader as exactly the converse. It assumes to record the remorseless working of relentless fate, and is in reality a remarkable piece of imaginative ingenuity as little convincing as a tract. Its framework and premises are ingeniously unnatural, and it contains hardly a natural person, save the victims of the unnatural conduct of the others. The book is thus addressed directly to the nerves rather than to the mind or the heart, and in this respect is no more a book *de bonne foy* than the most painful of Maupassant's. The principle against which it offends is perfectly plain. The element of fate in tragedy to be legitimate must be fatalistic. In "Feverel" one feels that it is absolutely facultative. Richard's ordeal would dissolve into the simplest of idyls at several stages in the development of the story, if it were not for the author's wilful ingenuity, exercised to the end of making the reader writhe. Being so quintessentially artificial, it is extremely typical of the succession of novels which thus ominously it introduced. It contains some of the best writing, some of the most winning scenes, some of the truest poetry to be found in Mr. Meredith's writings. But a tragedy of which the reader resents the obviously voluntary predetermination of the author to exact the utmost possible tribute

of distress from him is not so much tragedy as melodrama, and melodrama thoroughly sophisticated. Its psychology places it on a high plane for melodrama, but cannot disguise its character. And it is not difficult to see in the author's attitude toward his needlessly suffering characters the spirit which reveals Parrhasius, studying the contortions of his captive, as less a genuine artist than a dilettante *à outrance*.

Perversity prevails in the treatment as well as in the substance of Mr. Meredith's fiction. There is no other instance of such technical wilfulness. Many readers are repelled by what they term the obscurity of his style. But his style is not obscure in the general sense of the word. He has a wonderful gift of expression, and can not only say clearly the most recondite things, but give a recondite turn to things essentially quite commonplace. He does not love the obscure, but hates the apparent. He has that "horror of the obvious" so long ago as Longinus censured as hostile to the sublime. And as one cannot always avoid the obvious, especially if one is also extremely prolix, he does his best to obscure it. His vocabulary is never at a loss for a telling word when one is really called for. He can be crispness or curtness itself at need, often indeed wonderfully vivid, sometimes within and sometimes without and sometimes on the verge of the confines of taste, in his pursuit of vividness; for example, "He read and his eyes became horny" — of Dacier's horror and amazement at the evidence of

Diana's treachery. He makes few phrases that one remembers, however. He loads a phrase with meaning, but it is apt to be compression without pith, and often, in greater extension, it becomes rhetorical rather than pungent, though rhetoric that is never tinctured with insincerity. But where he cannot be telling, and even in cases where he might so easily be that he has an opportunity perversely to disappoint you by not being, he is exasperatingly evasive.

His devotion to the tricksy spirit of Comedy led him early to emulate her elusiveness; the interest in the game grew upon him, and his latest books are marked by the very mania of indirection and innuendo. It is not obscurity of style that makes it difficult to follow the will-o'-the-wisp of his genius disporting itself over, it must be confessed, the marshiest of territory often, but the actual *chevaux-de-frise* his ingenuity interposes between his reader and his meaning. The obscurity lies in his whole presentation of his subject. He doles it out grudgingly, and endeavors to whip your interest by tantalizing your perceptions. The elaborate exordium of "Diana of the Crossways" should be read after reading the book. The prelude of "The Egoist" can be understood at all only as a postlude. The beginning of "Beauchamp's Career" is essentially a peroration, and in reading it how long is it before you discover that it is about the Crimean War you are reading? If an incident is imminent he defers it; if it is far in the future he puzzles you with adumbrative hints of it; if

it is likely he masks its likelihood by presenting it fancifully; if it is improbable he exhausts ingenuity in rendering it probable. It is impossible not to conceive the notion that he is enjoying himself at your expense, at least that he is the host having a good time at his own party. It is not an occasional but a frequent experience to find the key to, say, three pages of riddle on the fourth page. And this would not be so disconcerting as it is, were it not for the fact that the riddle of the first three is carefully dissembled under the deceitful aspect of something palpably preliminary; so that until you come to the key you are not conscious of the existence of the riddle and only wonder why you don't comprehend. The interest of the dilettante is universal and no doubt includes the pleasure of mystification. The effect produced is, however, not suspense, which has been a reliance of less original novelists, but disquiet. His motive is to keep you guessing. He only explains when you have given it up. In the end even the reader who enjoys guessing must lose interest. For other readers the dulness of long stretches of his books must be appalling. A great part of the art of fiction consists in making the filling of the grand construction interesting and significant. But this demands temperament and Mr. Meredith has to depend upon artifice. And his artifice is mainly mystification. It is the coquetry of comedy, not its substance.

V

Mr. Meredith has a charming essay on "Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit," which discloses one of his ideals. He feels in English literature the lack of a Molière. But for this lack his own genius might, one suspects, have taken a different turn. But for this sprightly essay, at all events, we should be more in the dark than we are in accounting for many of its manifestations. It shows how complete is his devotion to the Comic Muse, how well he understands her, how jealous he is of her prerogatives and how he resents perversion of her principles. "Purely comic, addressed to the intellect," he says of one of his illustrations; of another, "It is not the laughter of the mind." The useful secondary title of "The Egoist" is "A Comedy in Narrative." "Evan Harrington" is early called "our comedy." One needs the warning in order to perceive the point of view. It is at first thought singular that they are among the most prolix as they certainly are among the most characteristic of his books, but it is because in them his technic is most explicitly theoretic, most predetermined by his *parti pris*. In them he gives himself free rein, and having written "Comedy" at the head of his story indulges himself to the top of his bent. The "comedy in narrative," though for that reason perhaps it affords his talent, which is as wilful and undisciplined as it is vital, a congenial *cadre*, is a hybrid *genre*. The comedy is often death to the narra-

tive. As a story Mr. Meredith's best book would be better for a closer resemblance to the ordinary respectable novel — for which, indeed, at a certain point so far as the story is concerned, one would often willingly exchange it. The necessities of comedy, the irruption of new characters, their disappearance after they have done their turn, expectation balked by shifting situations, the frequent postponement of the dénouement when it particularly impends, and the alleviation of impatience by a succession of subordinate climaxes — all the machinery of the stage, in fact — impair the narrative. A novelist with a theoretic devotion to comedy inevitably drifts into the stage atmosphere, which is, of course, a convention, an obvious illusion, of which we do not exact, but to which we accord, concessions so that things may be presented at all. Except in "Harry Richmond," Mr. Meredith simply never abandons himself to the current of romance.

Nor is it the narrative alone that suffers; the play is so much the thing that the characters are modified, often, in the direction of effective representation. The subtleties of the personages in "The Egoist," for example, are either broadened into types or twisted in slight metamorphosis to meet the exigencies of the enormously clever plot and its veritably "Box-and-Cox"-like development. In "Evan Harrington" it takes even Mr. Meredith's cleverness to make plausible the improbable conduct which nevertheless a dozen times he has to assign to some of his actors in order to defer the dénouement.

Heroes do not die in the middle of their history, he exclaims reassuringly, when Evan meets with an accident. No, one is tempted to reply, but it seems that they may whiffle like the chameleon to accommodate the action of a comedy. And when the spirit as well as the essential structure of the story is resolutely comic—keeping the ball constantly in the air—on the one hand the dramatic quality itself loses intensity, and, on the other, no cleverness can resist the siren-whispers of farce. Farce abounds in Mr. Meredith's novels, in spite of his frequently expressed disdain for it. It is simply the farce of whimsicality instead of that of grossness. And the tantalizing manner in which the dramatic is dissembled in "Evan Harrington" is typical of the way in which in many other instances the reader's interest is allowed gradually to escape him, while he is serenely pursuing his consistently comic course.

One effect of this predetermined comic treatment is the extremely unfortunate one of leaving the impression of levity. Who can take seriously the prelude of "The Egoist," for example? The author's fundamental seriousness must be admitted, but it is to be inferred from the gravity of his themes, and their often tragic development. In treatment it is frequently fatally compromised by the unrelieved persistency of the light touch. He is often enough heavy-handed, but always in the pursuit of deftness. He is elaborately, systematically, awkwardly airy. He is so in-

veterately theoretic that no detail of his theme swerves him from his addiction in treatment to "the extenuated style," as the old rhetoric called it. He is convinced that the substance should make its just impression by its own weight; that any addition of energy in its presentation is surplusage; that its presentation is merely illuminative; that only a rude taste could call for any underscoring reassurance as to the artist's own sympathies and earnestness. That is all to go without saying. One perceives that he is more civilized than civilization, and is tempted to ascribe the exaggeration of his extenuation, so to say, to an eccentricity born of his impatience with his English environment, culpably most lacking, no doubt, in precisely this respect of the light touch. Perversity being a marked characteristic of his talent, he illustrates the other extreme.

There is, as a matter of fact, throughout his books a patter of banter that is disconcerting, disquieting, and finally irritating. It is irony run to seed. It is so constant that it loses its relief. It ceases to illuminate by setting the subject in an unaccustomed light, and often obscures it by its inappositeness. The reader loses the point of view. Irony to be appreciated must be felt *as* irony. One not only tires of too much of it, but grows uncertain of its character when the distinction between its statement and its significance, its real and its superficial meaning, ceases to be evident. The constant withholding of the expected characterization, and the constant

substitution for it of one whose aptness depends upon the perception of the reader, require that the reader's powers of perception should not be fettered or exhausted. Mr. Meredith in the matter of irony, as in other phases of his ineradicable indirectness, flatters one's cleverness at first, but in the end he fatigues it. Apparently his aim is to circumvent it, and sooner or later he succeeds because, however much cleverness one may possess, one feels that one has other uses for it. Above all one resents the draft, the drain, upon one's confidence. We have to take the ironical author too much on trust.

It is not merely the detachment so often, and so literally, recommended to the artist that he illustrates. He is not merely detached, he is obliterated. All he shows us of himself is his talent; his standpoint is to be divined. And not only to be effective but to preserve its identity irony requires a standpoint that is obvious. We need to feel that it is not in earnest if it is to serve a purpose of any earnestness, and we need to feel that the writer is in earnest in order to perceive that his expression is not. But it is a detail of Mr. Meredith's general elusiveness that he does not often make us feel this with any force. His theory is that there is nothing flat-footed about the Comic Spirit, and his endeavor to incarnate this spirit is so thoroughgoing as to require the complete suppression of his personality even when it is needed as a guarantee of his seriousness. Nothing of the kind in the curiosities of literature is more extraordinary than this unexampled abuse of perhaps the

one figure of rhetoric which one would say a writer with a real talent for it would for that very reason be under no temptation to abuse. Mr. Meredith's talent for irony, nevertheless, is not to be denied. One of his very best characters, the Wise Youth Adrian in "Richard Feverel" is wholly built up out of it, for example. His talent is, however, less marked than his taste for it, and perhaps this is the explanation of the anomaly, which is, after all, thus only another of the many anomalies inseparable from the practice of art with the dilettante inspiration.

VI

His preoccupation with "brain-stuff," moreover, involves one serious defect in his picture of life: it minimizes passion. There is infinite talk in Mr. Meredith's books about love. He has written a sonnet series on "Modern Love," indeed, most interesting in its intricacies. But love as a passion he treats mainly, one may say, in trituration. There are express experiments in the other direction. The idyl of Richard Feverel and Lucy is as pretty, as charming, as its slightly eighteenth-century atmosphere, its Ferdinand and Miranda conceits, the playful but palpable aloofness of the author, will permit. The gondola courtship of Nevil Beauchamp is more than promising, but the experienced reader of Meredith is not surprised to encounter later even less than non-fulfilment. The love of Rosamund Culling for her husband's nephew is caressingly

sketched because it is recondite, but it is distinctly a minor and incidental element of the story. In general, anything properly to be called passion is presented with diluting playfulness. Even in seriousness, its weakness, not its force, is the side most emphasized. Mr. Meredith seems to care rather more for Nevil Beauchamp than for most of his characters, but he is so interested in preserving him from heroism, in his theoretic fashion, that he makes his passion not only the least persistent but the least intense phase of his energy, which is otherwise depicted as extravagant. Through the representativeness of Nevil's character, which is much insisted on, one is made to reflect on the transience and lack of depth in the passion of the average young man, however ebullient he may be. Can anything be tamer than the love-making of "Diana" or more debonair than that in "Harry Richmond" or more insubstantial than that in "The Egoist"?

But "The Tragic Comedians" furnishes the most striking instance of Mr. Meredith's disposition to psychologize love out of all passionate intensity. If "The Tragic Comedians" had been sustained to the end it would assuredly have been the fine thing it just misses being. But, like so many of Mr. Meredith's books, it is not sustained. Half-way through the story, indeed, the tragic comedians may be said to be metamorphosed into comic tragedians, through the fading out of the elevating intensity of their mutual passion. As elsewhere, the thesis, not the characters, is the main point,

and the thesis is that the obstacles to the smooth running of the course of true love are often not external but psychological. There is of course a very considerable external obstacle in the opposition of the heroine's parents. But it is made plain enough that this obstacle would not have proved effective had it not been for the alternate weakness of the lovers themselves, who are, as the title shows, really actors at bottom from the start. The effective obstacles to love which is also passion being, as a matter of fact, in proportion to its intensity, external and not psychological, the author is obliged by his thesis to diminish the intensity of what at the outset is portrayed as a passion of extraordinary violence; and to make this plausible the essentially theatrical character of the lovers has to be subsumed, as the metaphysicians say. The result is, as usual, that the picture, if true, is exceptional. It is another contribution to the cairn of the recondite. But what I wish to illustrate here is that the author's tunnelling and labyrinthine propensity for psychological analysis readily reconciles itself to the sacrifice of anything like sustained and ardent passion, even in a love story that ostensibly chronicles the most spontaneous and absolutely unreasonable abandonment to it. Other psychological novelists do not thus dispense with so important an element of both interest and verisimilitude. Mr. Meredith's insensitiveness to it witnesses the dilettante spirit indifferent to intensity of all kinds except that which is very special and express and therefore, I sup-

pose, really "worth while"—like the Squire's superb outburst in "Harry Richmond," for example, or the description of Nevil Beauchamp's delirium, which is a wonderful *tour de force*. Undoubtedly, too, intensity of any simple and fundamental order is prohibited by his theory of the comic which exerts such an empire over his practice. Love in Mr. Meredith's books wears the aspect perhaps best pleasing to the Comic Muse, of which he is so enamoured, but it is hardly the passion "that makes the world go round."

VII

NEVERTHELESS — and, at least superficially, the circumstance may be accounted singular — a considerable part of Mr. Meredith's vogue is probably due to his treatment of women, which is very special, and for that reason no doubt has especially won the suffrages of "the sex," as he is fond of calling it. The approbativeness of "the sex" at its present stage of evolution is perhaps manifested quite as much with reference to evaluation and appreciation as a sex as it is individually. It can hardly have escaped observers of such phenomena that it is as a sex that, currently, women particularly appreciate being treated as individuals. The more marked such treatment is, the more justice they feel is done to the sex. Mr. Meredith's treatment of them is in this respect very marked—so much so, in fact, that he obliterates very often the broad

distinction usually made between the young girl and the married woman. Diana, for example, leaves—in some respects—a maidenly, and some of his maidens produce a matronly, impression. With his women readers he has accordingly been, perhaps, particularly successful. He makes it unmistakably clear that women are psychologically worth while, complex, intricate and multifarious in mind as well as complicated in nature. He makes a point of this and underscores it, in a way that produces a certain effect of novelty by the stress he lays on it. The justice so fully rendered is given the fillip of seeming tardy justice, and therefore an element of Mr. Meredith's originality among writers of fiction. This is a good deal, but I think it is witness of a still greater originality in him that he goes still further. He lays even greater stress upon the fact that the being thus intricately interesting and worthy of scrutiny from the constitution of her individual personality is also that most interesting of all personalities, a feminine one. He adds the requisite touch of chivalry. He is, after all, a true *aficionado* of "the sex." He can be trusted to understand, not to be too literal, not to forget that the singularization implied in apotheosis is a very different thing from that involved in limitation. Women are to be discriminated as individuals, like men, but the fact that they possess in common and as women a certain distinctive quality is, above all, not to be lost sight of. This is the permanent, the *ewig*, fact about them. Only it is to be taken as a crown, not as a mere label.

Having thus won their confidence, he may say what he chooses without risk of misinterpretation at their hands. For example: "I expect that Woman will be the last thing civilized by Man," or that the Fools' Paradise is chiefly inhabited by women or "by women and a certain limp order of men." One could cite such instances by the score. He runs no risk of being thought to have "a contempt for women," of being thought superficial, that is to say. His talk about women is really as clever as that. A celebrated novelist of the present day is said to have remarked that he had reached a point finally when he could say anything he liked. Mr. Meredith has always been able to do that in the, for fiction, immense field concerned with women. It is—may one say?—almost touching to note the success with which by the simple means of compensatory magnification he contrives to be most uncompromising in his treatment of their defects. They have waited so long, some of them doubtless think, to be taken seriously in just this way and to just this extent!

One of his notable contentions, which he thus sets forth in security, is that women are morally quite as complex as men, and in virtue of an equally developed organization rather than of a contradictory and capricious nature. This is one of his main themes. The sexes have their differences, as he frequently points out, but he finds an exact equivalence here. And the idea is, in the prominence that it receives from him,

probably a genuine contribution to fiction. Other writers, notably Shakespeare (but one can hardly be theoretic without differing from Shakespeare), depict the moral side of women as both simpler and more closely allied with the entire nature. The women of fiction are apt to be generally classifiable as in the main —and much more than the men — either good or bad. All sorts of deductions have proceeded from this general assumption — such as, for example, that women being less exposed to temptation on account of greater seclusion have developed less principle; that when a woman is bad at all she is more apt to be thoroughly bad; that goodness in woman is more fundamental, being so completely the working hypothesis of her existence, practically considered; that her greater emotional development involves more ideality in good conduct and consequently less of it — that is to say, more cynicism — in bad.

With Mr. Meredith all this is changed by endowing women with an organization morally equivalent — and perhaps one may even say ethically identical — with that of men. He considers their responsibility the same, and, as a consequence, neither enjoys, in virtue of any singularity of native constitution, an immunity denied to the other. He permits himself to exercise the same freedom in his treatment of his women that he indulges in dealing with his men, and makes them do anything he chooses to have them in order to illustrate any point he wishes to make, exactly as if their moral

actions were as unpredictable, as facultative with him, as those of even his adventurers and feather-headed enthusiasts of the opposite sex. They are played upon by an equally wide range of conflicting emotions, desires, temptations, and their errors are quite as much due to their baser selves. When they succumb, they fall no lower, having suffered no perversion of their higher nature; and on the other hand, no complementary exaltation results from what is often exhibited by other artists as an uncontrollable deflection of this same higher nature. Diana Warwick is an instance of the former; and, among others, Lord Ormont's Aminta is a striking one of the latter, her infidelity needing to be explained and minimized by an amount of philistine machinery which makes her out rather an unfeeling creature at bottom and makes one long for a touch of human nature — like George Sand's. Is there a trace, one wonders, of what he calls the "burgess" even in this free and elastic devotee of ideality? He can depict Diana's baseness, but sin of the kind involved in following the affections into an extra-legal situation, he twice saves her from. He is a shade less careful with the marquise of "Beauchamp's Career." But even the Frenchwoman he saves — from everything but bitter humiliation. One perceives the limits his chivalry sets.

Nevertheless, it permits him to recoup himself now and then in sacrificing the innocence which is usually insistently associated with the virtue of women. No writer has a more abiding sense of the charm of women,

that charm which is so peculiar to them that when it is possessed by men it is only characterizable as feminine charm. He is haunted by it, as evinced in their physique, their manner, their movements. Diana "swims to the tea-table" — all his heroines "swim" in walking. He lingers over minute, caressing descriptions of their beauty — at somewhat confusing length over Clara Middleton's features, for example, though he is quite aware, as he says elsewhere, that a minute description of a face precludes a definite impression. But charm in his women is never incompatible with a kind of knowingness that makes innocence, strictly so-called, as little a characteristic of them as it is of the opposite sex. They have a great deal of self-reliance, of independence, of clairvoyance, such as even in men, one would say, is usually the fruit of experience. Such an exception as Dahlia, Rhoda Fleming's sister, who is incredibly credulous, is so marked an exception as of herself to prove the rule. Even the pusillanimous Letitia in "The Egoist" knows very well what she is doing, and one hardly resents her sacrifice to her extraordinary minotaur.

Innocence considered as a mental state is undoubtedly open to the objection of insipidity — like the amiability of an unfortified character. Innocence, however, as an attribute of the soul exerts a perennial charm. Perhaps nothing else quite takes its place, attractive as the "brain-stuff" which Mr. Meredith exalts incontestably is. And this, no doubt, is why,

since *ex hypothesi* it is irrecoverable, its loss is usually deplored. I think even about Mr. Meredith's maidens there is apt to be quite as much sparkle as bloom—at least, about his successes, Clara Middleton and Cecilia Halkett, for example. But certainly in his protagonist, Diana Warwick, he asks us to solace ourselves with brilliancy and temperament for the absence of the finer flavor of innocence. "Diana" is the book in which his ideal of the equivalence—as distinguished from the mere interdependence—of the sexes is most explicitly exposed, though everywhere in his novels one finds evidence of it, and, as an important deduction in detail from this general proposition, the according to women of a sentimental freedom corresponding to the grosser liberty condoned in men. The unworthiness of the old pursuer-and-pursued sex-division yields to the justice of permitting woman the same spontaneous interest in the other sex that is allowed to man, instead of confining such interest to reciprocation; and the further step is, perhaps necessarily, therefore, taken of placing her sentimental irregularities upon the same plane with his excesses. Serious flirtation, in a word, of the Célimène-Millamant order (those ladies are great favorites with Mr. Meredith) is relatively as venial in her case as are excesses in his — and is privileged to the same promiscuity. The question of moral reprehensibility, of course, is quite aside, though the implication would be that, admitting degrees in moral reprehensibility, they would in this parallel be the

same. Any insistence that women should be sentimentally restricted, on the part of men who permit themselves experiences of the kind Jeremy Collier quaintly calls latitudinarian, is made by Mr. Meredith to appear inseparable from what he plainly regards as the feminine ideal of the Grand Turk. "Men may have rounded Seraglio Point. They have not yet doubled Cape Turk," is one of Diana's sententious deliverances. "Let woman have the widest sensational liberty she likes within the confines of virtue," he argues. "If you wince at the phenomena involved — her dangling poets like Arthur Moore, her superannuated lovers and their priggish nephews, her entire necessarily second-rate retinue and her easy acquiescence in its second-rateness — either you are interested and therefore incapable of fairness or you are an outsider as pedantic and *arriéré* as Alceste. What is this bloom of innocence you prize so highly and possess so little of? Merely the desideratum of a crude, not to say savage, instinct of the masterful male, uncivilized and undeveloped. Evolution will inevitably dispose of it in due season, and meantime it would be the part of wisdom in you to wince less and be worthier."

At all events, innocence in the sense of simplicity is rather pointedly excluded from Mr. Meredith's feminine ideal. And it follows naturally, perhaps, that, having set up "the sex" in a more elaborate spiritual organization than is usually conceded to it by those who affirm it to be nearer to nature than the

other, he should exalt its claims to standards of its own. This is the other main proposition that he is fond of enforcing—or rather, considering his inveterate elusiveness, of allowing it to be divined that he advocates. Women have been long enough what men like them to be, what men make them. It is time that they imposed their own ideal and became a little more exacting. Let them study their own independence as the one priceless possession, exalt their dignity as women and extort from masculine fairness conformity to *their* order of aspiration. Let man, on the other hand, learn that woman is never so admirable as when she substitutes for the motive of pleasing him the nobler one of realizing her own destiny and following her own star, developing to its highest potency her own individuality.

Some such view as this I gather, at all events, is the basis of Mr. Meredith's infinite talk about "the sex," and of his various incarnations of what to him is the *ewig weibliche.* It is doubtless an inspiring view, though, as I have intimated, its novelty, perhaps, consists largely in its emphasis. There are times and places, eras and environments, in which the patronage of women by men has appeared rudimentary and ridiculous, just as there are others—and perhaps in his own he has found this especially true—in which a certain degree of dependence and insipidity in women forms a part of the masculine ideal of them. And the fact that Mr. Meredith's women are to many readers

less effective than many of their sisters in fiction limned by greater artists is not destructive of his general philosophic view. But heretofore, in a general way, when an identical standard of innocence has been advocated for the two sexes, it has been the standard of women. Nevertheless, so old is the subject of the relations of the sexes that there are reasons for doubting if his view is at all certain to get itself established — if it is not rather destined at most to prove a view of what is called a "period of transition." Women themselves, even women richly endowed with "brain-stuff," being the practical and conservative creatures Mr. Meredith frequently calls them, cannot be relied upon with any certainty to take his view of their privileges. It may seem logical and only fair, from a speculative point of view, but innocence of heart is such an important asset with them that the exchange of it for the satisfaction to be gained by getting sensations out of the emotions of others — as flirtation, for example, might be defined — is likely to seem a risk.

For the real obstacle to setting up a parallel between women's sentimental and men's grosser extravagances is that innocence of heart is lost in the one case and not in the other. In the latter, efficacious detergents for the resulting stain — which is, of course, ideally speaking, detestable — are not inaccessible, the heart not being in any way in question. In the former this organ incurs the peril of either petrifaction or perversion. It involves the relation of familiarity with-

out intimacy—the exact converse of the true sexual relation. The stakes may not be high and the player is generally sure of winning, but her fastidiousness is the entrance fee, her opponents are apt to be her inferiors, and the counters, which receive a good deal of handling in the course of the game, are her own charms. Diana's were burnished or tarnished in the process, as one chooses to look at it. But it is a little significant that a man of exceptionally large heart combined with exceptional phlegm had to be provided for the appreciation of what was left of her. One can hardly avoid noting the fact as part of the artificiality of her history. In real life, it is to be feared, the situation would have called for a character far more nearly resembling the undiscouraged chevalier of Manon Lescaut — a truly lamentable pair, these two, but quick with a humanity denied to the theoretic creations of a novelist speculatively occupied with the relations of the sexes. It is perhaps possible that the Manon of the future will be a Diana, in virtue of her superior "brain-stuff." There would be an element of variety, no doubt, in women's losing their approbativeness as regards either the admiration or the respect of the opposite sex, and this sex is one to which variety in the other has always strongly appealed. One thing, however, is, I suppose, to be accepted as so certain that possibly Mr. Meredith's suggested reform will prove fatal to the very equilibrium it seeks to establish: Whether or no women are to cease to be what men wish, it is certain

that men, on their side, will continue to be what women make them. The "view" taken in the following paragraph, which has nothing theoretic about it, to be sure, will as certainly be that of the future as it has been of the past:

"And I say I think the world is like Captain Esmond's company I spoke of anon; and could you see every man's career in life you would find a woman clogging him; or clinging round his march and stopping him; or cheering him and goading him; or beckoning him out of her chariot so that he goes up to her, and leaves the race to be run without him; or bringing him the apple and saying 'Eat'; or fetching him the daggers and whispering 'Kill! yonder lies Duncan, and a crown and an opportunity.'"

VIII

In any case, however, Mr. Meredith's treatment of women is distinctly an imaginative treatment and reminds us that one of his chief titles to his high rank as a novelist is an extraordinary imagination. It is an imagination remarkable not only for exuberance but for scope. Like every other phase of his talent it is unchecked, but it is unmistakably both opulent and acute. Its exercise gives one the feeling that he is never at a loss for incident or motive, and makes that effect of inexhaustible fulness, of self-renewing potentiality, of there being plenty more left in his sack, which

is a definite mark of genius. He never "saves for the next book," as Mr. Henry James says. One feels the assurance that he never needs to save. Novelty, and significant novelty, is his element. He is never at a loss for a theme—a real theme, capable of organic and intricate elaboration and having itself interest and vitality. Details spring spontaneously into flower in fertile profusion along the path of its development. He must be the envy of the more strictly professional novelists. One understands the reported remark of Mr. Stevenson: "He is the master of all of us." In imagination "Harry Richmond" certainly stands at the head of the modern fiction that essays the difficult task of enduing with vivid realistic intensity material of the most exceptionally romantic character. It was probably the first of the *genre*. "Kidnapped," "Treasure Island," "Prince Otto," "St. Ives" derive from it very strictly. It is the result of the imagination combined with thought, with reflection—the imagination which has a strong tincture of intellect, whose luxuriance though unrestrained is directed by a sophisticated, or at least the literary, inspiration. It reminds us that Mr. Meredith's imagination is kept too well in hand for pure spontaneity. It is the servant of his artifice. His invention, which is of an astonishing activity, outruns it. Half-way through "Harry Richmond," for example, it flags, and a little further fails altogether, though the author's mechanical inventiveness increases proportionally in intricacy and endeavor for plausi-

bility. The spontaneity with which the story started and which stimulated its remarkable rapidity of movement and variety of detail has exhaled, and for a couple of hundred pages we drag along with gradually diminishing momentum.

I have said that his world is not a real one and it is not. It is an extremely artificial one. But his imagination endues it with indubitable animation. It is animate like that of the Restoration drama, for which he has a weakness, and which, in spite of the robustness of many of the typical characters, is often similarly unreal. One could form but a faint conception, for example, of how his "puppetry" (his word for Thackeray's people) would look, or what they would say or do, should they all meet at some large party in "fable-land." Yet it is eminently "fable-land" that is their home. Nothing is more curious than the *va-et-vient* of Mr. Meredith's figures, pulled by general rather than individual psychological strings, amid the highly poetized fields and woods and highways and sea-shores that his fancy furnishes for their playground.

His poetic faculty is very clear and very distinguished. As exhibited in his formal verse it is perhaps too surcharged with significance to have the plastic interest essential to verse. It is in form so convoluted as often to be obscure to the point of being unreadable. But he is a great landscape-painter. He has the poet's concrete vision. He never indulges in

the rhapsody of the rhetorician. Some of his descriptions of nature are extremely beautiful, even memorable, in their combined radiance and precision. Occasionally, one reflects, they are a little too important. Not only are they digressions, like his famous "wine" and "ale" excursions, but now and then, though background, they exchange values with the figures. But Mr. Meredith's background, landscape aside, is in general as unreal as his figures, and contributes to the net artificial impression made by his books. It is rarely localized, in the sense of reference to actual places. Any of his action might take place anywhere. Mainly it takes place in England, as a matter of fact, but there is no specific picture of the real England of town or country. It might equally well have occurred in Barataria. The contrast with the background of Dickens and Thackeray, Trollope and George Eliot is in this respect very great. It is true that when his background is landscape Mr. Meredith's poetic faculty gives it a reality of its own, an imaginative reality. But in his novels his poetic faculty is almost altogether consecrated to the service of nature—nature and now and then the youthful feminine countenance, as where in "Beauchamp's Career" he deliciously describes Renée's features as having "the soft irregularities which run to rarities of beauty, as the ripple rocks the light." In dealing with character he explicitly abandons it to grasp at purely intellectual interest, at what he calls and worships as "Philosophy." "Phi-

losophy" and consequent preoccupation with "brain-stuff" is, he says in the introduction to "Diana"—a little naïvely perhaps for so true a dilettante—the one ingredient needful in the composition of fiction heretofore neglected even by such a Titan as Thackeray, but hereafter to be supplied by himself in spite of the aversion to it of the philistine British public. Unfortunately for his theory, his own practice, at any rate, results in the more or less gradual transformation of imagination into mere invention, so that the animation of his characters, which at the outset is often active enough, owing to the vivacity of his conception of them (owing, that is to say, to his imagination), declines into distinctly mechanical movement (which is all that invention can command). In a word, his imagination, even, has its factitious side.

IX

His most unimpeachable claim, one is finally forced to conclude, is his general intellectual eminence. About that there can be no manner of doubt. It is lofty, definite and impressive. No novelist has so many ideas. He is the embodiment of culture, but he is absolutely independent, and does his own thinking with noticeable care and self-reliance. His learning, his reading, is obviously very great, but it is thoroughly assimilated. He has no pedantries; his recondite allusions, though frequent, are always sincere and apt. His training has

been of the broadest; his Continental education is easily seen in his point of view, his freedom from provinciality of any kind, the untrammelled and untraditional character of his criticism, his very notable elasticity. Full as he is of whims, he has no prejudices. His candor is a conspicuous trait, and the reader comes insensibly to rely upon it — a circumstance that increases the exasperation produced by the odd conjunction with his candor of his perversity. And — an unusual combination, perhaps — he unites with this distinction of culture a wholly extraordinary power of insight. His penetration is wonderfully acute. And human character is its true field. One can hardly overpraise him here. At every turn you are reminded of his having noted some peculiarity of thought, some trait elicited by certain circumstances, phenomena of mind and motive that you at once recognize as true and often as recondite as well. A large proportion of his readers, at least his admiring readers, probably enjoy the experience of saying to themselves every few pages: "Ah! He knows that, too, it seems. I have never encountered that in any other writer. This I have myself remarked, but had supposed it my own discovery. How odd that I should never have thought of that, but how true it is!" And active-minded readers have few experiences more enjoyable.

He does not, often, perhaps, make *you* think. He does not in general stimulate reflection. He is always actively thinking himself, but after you have thought

out his meaning on occasions when it is obscure you are apt to relapse into rumination at best. In this respect he is the antithesis of George Eliot, for example, whose pregnant observations have the property of starting trains of thought. Moreover, his gift of expression leads him to leave nothing to the reader. In cases where he does not dissemble his meaning through perversity, his power of explicit, and tendency to exuberant, expression exhaust the subject. Take him at his best: "That excruciating twist within of the revolution of the wheels of the brain snapping their course to grind the contrary to those of the heart." Excellent as this is — "grind" is particularly penetrating and graphic — it has hardly the suggestiveness of such a chance phrase as George Eliot's "early morning tears," or Thackeray's mere association of "women and priests." And in general, I think, if his observations on human life, character, relations, have a defect corresponding to their admirable quality, it is that, spite of their penetration, they lack what the French call *portée*. They have a distinct tendency to note peculiarities. They are the result of scrutiny, many-faceted and never partial, but not of the comprehensive gaze that sees psychologic detail as part of a vaster whole which it keeps ever in mind. If they were, one would find, as one rarely if ever does, the same observation recurring from time to time, as different situations bring out the same central truth. The kind of thing one generally finds — and delights in — in Mr. Mere-

dith is: "Men's faith in a woman whom her sisters discountenance and partially repudiate is uneasy, however deeply they may be charmed. On the other hand, she may be guilty of prodigious oddities without much disturbing their reverence, while she is in the feminine circle." Or: "The attempt to read an inscrutable woman allows her to dominate us too commandingly." Or: "Ruffling and making that pretence at the controlling of her bosom which precedes a feminine storm."

Nevertheless, Mr. Meredith's books spread out before one a multifarious network of circumstance and situation whose reaction on that most interesting of all impression-registering media, human nature, is subtly, sapiently, always elaborately considered. There are a half-dozen pages in the fifth chapter of "The Tragic Comedians," for instance, dealing with the effect upon lovers of their mistresses' previous experiences of the heart, that constitute a kind of essay on the subject such as would make the fortune of many a "psychological novelist." There are passages everywhere in all his books that show the acutest discrimination and the subtlest philosophical generalizing. Gathered into an anthology of his "wit and wisdom," as they have been, they are, to be sure, easily less striking; "The Pilgrim's Scrip" is not a serious rival of La Rochefoucauld. Their significance has more relief when one meets them swimming in the stream of the author's prolixity, where they seem like "glorious islets" and gain meaning by contrast; but here their unexpected solidity is very

effective. In a word, whatever one's impressions of Mr. Meredith's novels as novels, they indubitably contain a great deal of apt, entertaining and original comment upon the general subject of human nature.

The fact, however, has two modifications which, as constantly as itself, are forced upon the reader's attention. In the first place, his art gains nothing or next to nothing from the "Philosophy" to which he is so devoted. This not only quite eclipses his art in interest, but, being so essentially of a generalizing cast, consisting so exclusively of general reflections suggested by the specific business in hand, is at most a decoration rather than an auxiliary of it. His philosophizing is concrete enough in itself, but it is so used as to render his art abstract. It saps the substance and obscures the outline of his characters by withdrawing attention from them and concentrating it on "the human heart" in general, its various phases and intricate organization as illustrated by the personages whom it should rather itself illuminate and explain. What is Sir Willoughby Patterne but incarnate comment on the text of egoism? In a word, his philosophy, interesting as it is, weakens his characterization — certainly the novelist's main business.

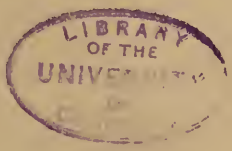
In the second place, it is confined to psychological phenomena — undoubtedly a source of strength within its limits but in itself a notable limitation of his range of intellectual interests. There are some politics and social economy in "Beauchamp's Career," but in the

other novels the whole intellectual field outside of the study of "the human mechanism" is neglected. There is an occasional reference to national characteristics, a rebuke to British misconception of France and Frenchmen here and there, and for the rest a quite wonderful feeling for nature and a remarkably poetic faculty of concrete portrayal of it. No "questions" of any kind interest Mr. Meredith. Italian unification is an inspiration in "Vittoria" and there is a sympathetic reference to woman suffrage in "Diana." But such things do not count beside the conspicuous fact that his world, sharp as is the philosophic shadow that it casts, has no philosophic penumbra. Religion does not enter his realm at all. Art does not exist there. Philosophy, as distinct from philosophizing, has no attractions for him. He has no system, even the vaguest, and no general synthesis. His "criticism of life," though penetrating and perhaps consistent, is limited and above all desultory. No one would think of calling him a philosopher in any strict sense, or, outside the realm of psychology, in any sense at all. He has eminently no standing as a sentimentalist, in the sense in which Richardson, Rousseau and Thackeray are sentimentalists. As a moralist he has no direct and striking force. His novels are hardly prevented by his professed devotion to "Philosophy" from being a contribution to literature of the "art for art's sake" order. The Comic Muse exacts his exclusive allegiance in treatment of the gravest substance. "All fables," says Thoreau,

"have their morals, but the innocent enjoy the story." Mr. Meredith's fables have no morals, which is perhaps the reason why they are most attractive to the sophisticated. No such picture of human life, so highly organized and so elaborately commented, was ever so little of a text for deductions of real moment as to the world of which it is ostensibly a miniature and a criticism. And this being the case, it is to be regretted that, since it is only beauty that is its own excuse for being, the picture is not more artistically effective or more temperamentally compelling.

His imagination, his intellectual eminence and his analytic treatment of human nature, however, give his novels a rank in the literature of fiction which neither his constructive art nor his temperament would, unaided, win for them. The fact itself is remarkable. That so really imposing an edifice as his varied and numerous books compose should be unsupported by either of these two elements of enduring strength — one of which may be lacking, but rarely both in any structure of monumental dignity, literary or other — of itself constitutes one of the most interesting of literary anomalies. But what one misses most in his work is the large rhythm that undulates through that of the great writers, the sustained note of informing purpose, the deep vibration of some unifying undertone, now rising to accent and emphasis, now sounding faintly beneath the multifariousness of accompanying motives, but always audible to an attentive sense as the basis if not the burden

of the "theme with variations" that the *ensemble* of every great writer's compositions constitutes. Mr. Meredith has no theme; he has a dozen, a score — as many as he has books. And this, I imagine, is the standing menace to the increase of his popularity and the permanence of his fame.



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